FROM THE GARDEN OF THE MATHNAWI

# Tears of the Heart

## Rumi Selections

OSMAN NURİ TOPBAŞ

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# Tears of the Heart

By

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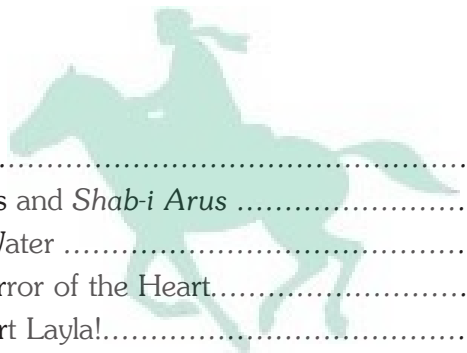


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# Preface

Praise be to Allah the Exalted who has blessed us, his powerless servants, with the joy and peace of true faith; and peace and blessings be on the Endless Pride of the Universe, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ who has led humanity from darkness to boundless light.

May Allah grant our hearts a lofty fortune from the spiritual abode of the companions of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the revered friends of Allah, who have guided believers to the right path and may He bless our hearts with fruitful winds from the wide horizons of their infinite spirituality.

The honorable *Mathnawi,* composed more than seven hundred years ago by master Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* in a vast state of love and ecstasy, has indeed come to occupy a unique place in the hearts of those searching for the divine.

Just as the heart of a friend of Allah may not decay after death, so too those works of art that have emanated from such an incorrupt heart are immortal. After passing away, people with such refined hearts continue to live

among us as they perform their services in the spiritual world. Their longevity transcends that of those who live only physically. Even if the transient physical bodies of their authors decompose in the grave and turn into dust, the works of their hearts, imbued with the fragrance of the eternal, will survive until the Day of Judgment.

Approaching the presence of the Lord through such spiritual fortune is only possible for those who have kept worldliness outside of their hearts; have not been enslaved by fame; and have totally submitted to the divine will. The great master Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* and his works, which are emanations from his heart, must be viewed in this manner.

In our history, the title *sharif* (honorable) is bestowed by our community on only three books, reflecting the illumined hearts of their authors: The first is the honorable Bukhari (*Bukhari-i Sharif* which is a collection of hadith); the second is the honorable Shifa (*Shifa-i Sharif* by Qadi al-'Iyad which is a biography of Prophet Muhammad); and the third is the honorable *Mathnawi* (*Mathnawi-i Sharif* by Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* which is a work of Sufi poetry). During the Ottoman period, these three magnificent texts were studied in mosques under the guidance of scholars authorized to teach by mentors that had in turn been chosen for their scholarly role by others similarly qualified and thus this chain of transmission continued back to the original author himself.

Among the incidents demonstrating the importance of these works is a spiritual dream Sheikh al-Islam Ibn Kemal Pasha had about the *Mathnawi*. He related the following:

"In my dream I saw the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. He was holding in his hand the *Mathnawi* and saying:

'So many spiritual books have been composed. Yet, among these books, none is comparable to the *Mathnawi*.'"

While commenting on Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* the great master AbdurRahman Jami said:

"What can I say about the greatness and the attributes of that friend of Allah? His *Mathnawi* is a matchless ocean of wisdom."

Indeed, the *Mathnawi* is an ocean of bottomless depth with boundless meaning and uncountable secrets. Few books can be found that explain the Sufi doctrine in such detail. Through his use of stories, spiritual subjects difficult to comprehend by the mind are able to deeply penetrate the heart of the reader.

Commentators have written of the *Mathnawi*:

"The Qur'an begins with the command 'Read!' while the *Mathnawi* begins with the command 'Listen!' The latter is an explanation of the former. We are told: 'Listen to the divine word! Listen to its secrets! Listen to the truth hidden within you!'" In other words, breezes emanating from the *Mathnawi*, originating in the truth and secrets of the glorious Qur'an, fan the fire of spiritual love in the hearts of students on the spiritual path.

The *Mathnawi* is a poetic embodiment of Rumi's inner world reflected in couplets and is a book of rich blessing filled with great gifts of fortune. Although an esoteric account of the divine journey Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* began under the supervision of Shams al-Tabrizi, it has nevertheless been written according to the needs and degree of understanding of ordinary people. It is a record of unceasing cries and tears borne of his inner suffering

traceable to the loss of his teacher Shams and his subsequent inability to find anyone suitable with whom to share his spiritual struggles.

The great master Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* has described the *Mathnawi* as follows:

*"The Mathnawi is a path of light for those who want to attain to the Truth, understand divine secrets, and become familiar with them."*

The city of Konya has taken from Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* its color and harmony. It has enjoyed his blessings for seven centuries. It seems that Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* the *Mathnawi,* and Konya are synonymous. If one is mentioned, the other is immediately recalled.

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* bequeathed a great gift to humanity by recording as a book the spiritual journey of his illumined, feeling heart. The entire content of the *Mathnawi* is summarized in the following couplet:

*"If you have a heart, make tawaf (i.e. the ritual of walking in circles around the Ka'aba) around it! Spiritually speaking, the real Ka'aba, not the worldly one made of stone and dust, is the heart.*

*Allah has made it obligatory to perform tawaf around the tangible Ka'aba so that one might attain to a pure and cleansed Ka'aba of the heart."*

Through the mercy of Allah, Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* penetrated to the very depth of the human soul and thus was able to witness its unveiled inner workings. Through the sheer radiance of that vision, the text penetrates the secrets of creation that unfolded before his inner eye:

*"I became a servant, became a servant, and became a servant…*

*I, the powerless servant, became ashamed for failing to fulfill my servanthood. Therefore, I put my head down…*

*Every servant becomes happy if set free. O my Lord! I am in joy because I am your servant."*

These expressions give us a taste for the depth of enthusiasm and joy emanating from his servanthood to Allah. As an extension of this, let us not fail to remember that Allah the Almighty has revealed His aim in the creation of man as follows:

**"I have only created Jinns and human beings so that they may serve me"** (Zariyat, 56)**.**

❁

The *Mathnawi* is a conversation between Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* and his student Husameddin. It opens through his contact with Husameddin and by virtue of their association moves forward. If one were to depart, the current flowing between them would cease to circulate. When they would re-unite, their hearts would once again be swollen with currents of spiritual joy and the couplets would again flow.

The great master Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* said: "*I composed this Mathnawi in such a way that it suits Husameddin."* This statement is actually a lament for not being able to express his secret as his heart desired due to the loss of the ocean of love named Shams. Had Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* written the *Mathnawi* as a conversation with Shams, who knows what great secrets might have

manifested in its couplets through the burning songs that would have erupted from it?

Fariduddin Attar, may Allah be pleased with him, resembles Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* in his vision of life. He too was in distress for not being able to find someone who could understand him. His words below express their mutually common state:

*I was a bird. I flew from the world of secrets. My purpose was to take a prey up with me (i.e. find a friend who could understand my secret). Unfortunately, I could not find anyone familiar with secrets. I returned through the same door I had used to enter.*

❁

The great master Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* has told hundreds of stories that are intertwined with one another. His purpose has been to lead us into drawing lessons from them through our spontaneous application of reason and our construction of analogies. In other words, he has succeeded in making subjects well beyond the reach of our rational minds comprehensible in an experiential manner. Consequently, his purpose transcends the mere transmission of legends. He has explained this as follows:

"The purpose is to draw lessons from stories, not to tell tales…."

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* conveys his admonitions, advice, and warnings in the form of stories. Therefore, his desire is for his audience to understand deeply the truth and spirit underlying them.

*O brother and sister! The story resembles the husk while the meaning resembles the kernel of wheat inside*

*it. The intelligent person consumes and digests the wheat, without being distracted by the husk!*

*Listen to the outer aspect of the story but make sure that you know how to separate the wheat from the chaff.*

*My words are never pointless tales. Think about them; they reflect our current state.*

One may clearly understand from these statements that there are many deep lessons and messages to be gleaned from the stories Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* has told. For this reason, one should always strive to understand the inner meanings without being distracted by the vehicles used to articulate them.

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* has also explained that the purification of one's heart is only possible through association with a perfectly qualified teacher who, being an heir to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is capable of such a spiritual transmission. He stresses that without overcoming the obstacle of the ego, external knowledge cannot be realized as internal wisdom. Likewise, without attaining to this one can understand neither the purpose of our creation nor the honor of our existence, and finally without this one cannot discover his inner essence. Protection from the evils of the ego requires that one be able to know oneself through the realization of his nothingness before the divine glory, and through discovering that the journey to Allah can be carried out only by virtue of an internal life based on divine love.

The great master Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* illustrates unpracticed external knowledge as follows: "To be sure, good words that are not put into practice are as but a

beautifully decorated but unbecoming, temporarily owned dress."

❁

Today, we are in great need of the mercy that came through Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* seven centuries ago. Let us observe the beauty of the following supplication. In it, he expresses the deep feeling of compassion that emanates from the practice of loving creation only for the pleasure of its Creator:

*O my Lord! If your mercy is reserved only for those with pure hearts, then where will the sinful find refuge?*

*O my Almighty Allah! If you accept only the pious people, then to whom will the guilty turn in prayer? (...) Surely, you are the Most Compassionate!*

❁

Our Lord has blessed us with an urn of water and a bouquet of tulips enlivened with a fire of Love from the boundless garden of the heart He bestowed on Rumi, *quddisa sirruh*. Also, May Allah bless the soul of my late teacher Abdulqadir Efendi (Yaman Dede), who injected a thirst for this water into my soul during my student years as he unveiled the *Mathnawi* more through the benediction of his tears than through the words he uttered.

I ask my Lord to allow me to benefit from the intercession of the great friend of Allah, Mahmud Sami Ramazanoglu, who has allowed my soul to taste of the love of the friends of Allah. He gives boundless pleasure to hearts when remembered through his blessings.

I also ask my Lord to grant my respected master, my spiritual and physical father, Musa Efendi, a long, healthy, and happy life, full of worship and teaching.[1]

Dear Readers,

The contents of this book, which I present with the title '*From the Garden of the Mathnawi*', is as a bouquet of tulips enlivened with a fire of Love in an urn of water gathered from the elixir of the spring of the heart which resides in the gardens of the friends of Allah.

I pray to my Lord that this bouquet of tulips and urn of water may too inspire burnings and longings in our hearts, leading ultimately to an outpouring of the spring of Zamzam in the gardens of our hearts. Using this opportunity, I would like to make a request from you:

Please read the *Fatiha* (the Opening Chapter of the Qur'an) and send the divine reward gained from it as a spiritual gift to the souls of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ his companions, all friends of Allah, particularly Rumi, *quddisa sirruh*, the king of hearts, as well as to the soul of the spring of blessing, Aziz Mahmud Hudai, and also to Musa Efendi from whose spiritual teachings we have all benefited.

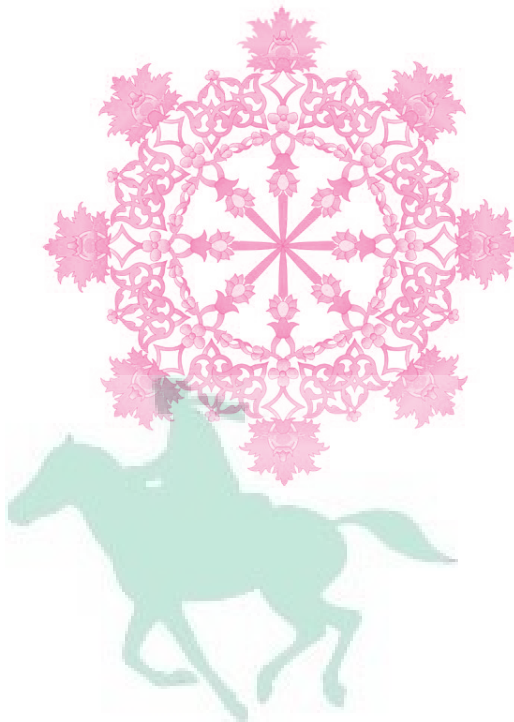
May Allah make the last moment of our life a *Shab-i Arus* (i.e.Wedding Night). Success comes from Allah alone.

**Osman Nuri Topbaş**

**Istanbul**

1. Since the date of this book's original publication in Turkish, Musa Efendi's life in this world has come to an end and he has passed across the threshold into the abode of the Afterlife.

# Rumi, Shams and Shab-i Arus



*I was dead, yet became alive,*
*I was a tear yet became a smile,*
*I entered the ocean of love,*
*And reached the eternal happiness!*

Rumi

Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* and his family first settled in Konya. Later, during his thirties, Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* traveled to Aleppo and Damascus for higher education. One day, as he was walking in the streets of the market place, a strange person approached him and said:

– Let me kiss your hand; O, the one who has the knowledge of the worlds!

He grabbed the hands of Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* and kissed them with great respect and passion. Then, he suddenly disappeared in the crowd. Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* was shocked by this unexpected event. He was perplexed and greatly amazed by it. The enigmatic person had puzzled him.

Years later one day when Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* was conversing with his students, in front of the school in Konya, after they had left class, he suddenly met the same person who had shocked him in Damascus long ago by kissing his hand. This man was named Shams al-Tabrizi,

the sun of Tabriz. He also joined the circle around Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* and, with great excitement, asked the following unusual question:

– Which one is greater, Prophet Muhammad Mustafa *sallahu alaihi wa sallam* or Bayazid al-Bistami?

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* was terrified by such a question. He loudly retorted with fury:

– What kind of question is this? How can a Prophet, who was sent as a mercy to the worlds, be compared to a saint whose mere capital came from following that Prophet?

Shams al-Tabrizi calmly explained his question:

– Then why did Bayazid pray for Allah to make his body so vast that it would fill the entire Hellfire, thereby leaving no place for other sinners? Bayazid also said: "My glory is great! I glorify myself!" after having witnessed only a few divine manifestations while, on the other hand, the Prophet Muhammad *sallahu alaihi wa sallam* was continuously asking for more with great humility although he had witnessed endless divine manifestations?

This explanation brought Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* to the last point on which reason could shed light and it was impossible for him to reply to the question from the position afforded by his current state of consciousness. Shams then pushed him further ahead from that point with the weapon of divine experience. What was beyond was the endless world of Allah's presence. Shams thus took his interlocutor, who had been unaware of his spiritual station, on a journey towards the horizon of the spiritual world.

Under the impact of this sudden leap forward; Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* replied with the following as if it was a

matter of external or rational science he had earlier memorized:

– The words of Bayazid praising himself were an expression of saturation as his spiritual thirst had been satisfied by a limited divine manifestation. Consequently, his soul had no demand for more. His soul entered a state of ecstasy. The ocean was endless yet this had been the amount he could handle. On the other hand, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was blessed with the secret of **"Have We not caused thy bosom to dilate?"** (Inshirah, 1)**.** He was surrounded by divine manifestations. Yet, his expanded heart never became satisfied. His thirst ever increased. The more he drank, the thirstier he became. He continuously moved on from one spiritual state to another and repented for being in the previous lower level. He said, "Every day, I ask for forgiveness from Allah seventy or a hundred times." He asked his Glorious Lord for more intimacy at every subsequent moment. His passion was endless, yet the distance between the Lord and the servant was endless times endless. Consequently, he frequently sought refuge in Allah by praying: "O my Lord! I cannot know you the way you deserve to be known… I cannot worship you the way you deserve to be worshipped…"

The mission of Shams had been to elevate the understanding and insight of Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* to a level that could not be reached by positive rational sciences. For this reason, he screamed with joy as he experienced the joy in expansion that arises when a person has crossed the threshold to a sublime goal. He fainted. This is how a current of light, which will last forever, was established between these two stars of the spiritual world.

Afterwards, the hidden ocean in the heart of Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* remained in a continuous state of turbulence. From that moment forward, the heart of Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* began burning as if it were a sea of petroleum that had been enflamed by a spark. This is how the Shams of Tabriz enflamed the heart of Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* but he found himself witnessing an explosion in which he too was burned. From then on, their understandings and shares of divine knowledge became one.

After this event, we see that Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* suddenly began living in ecstasy, despite his previous humble life as a teacher in the school, the madrasa. The mission of Shams of Tabriz had been to enflame this ocean of meaning.

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* described his life, which consisted of three phases, in three words: "I was raw, I was cooked and I was burned!"

The last phases are called in *tasawwuf* "*fanafillah*" and "*baqabillah*."

The servant who is at the level of "*fanafillah*" completely subdues his ego and surpasses all his mundane passions. At the level of "*baqa billah*," the love of Allah prevails in the heart. Divine light illuminates the heart of the servant who reaches to this level.

What is a human being? A human being is a divine manifestation that has descended from the glory of Allah, which may be understood by the human mind only through exploring the reasons and pretexts in this world for multiple levels of manifestation. He is a world in himself embodying different manifestations. He is a living Qur'an. Yet, in

comparison to his overall truth, what he understands is almost nothing.

It is a manifestation of the exceptional generosity of the Lord that some individuals are given the ability to approach the horizon of the glory of their human existence. Such individuals are assigned guides. Ordinary events filling hundreds of years of human history are unable to bury their exalted legacy. Shams was such a guide, and he took Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* on a spiritual journey. Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* would never forget his first experience of the world of divine presence. This world had been hidden in his heart and the remembrance of it was granted to him as a gift. He would always remember Shams with loyalty until the end of his life. In fact, he was beyond Shams. Perhaps, after this spark, Shams found himself to be a disciple of Rumi, *quddisa sirruh*.

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* met Shams in Konya around the age of forty. He can be described before this meeting as a second Imam Ghazali.

Yunus mentioned Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* as follows:

*Rumi Hudawandighar (the King)!*

*Spared a gaze on us with the eye of his heart,*

*Since then his glorious gaze*

*Became the mirror of my heart!*

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* was only a jurist in the first phase of his life. He was a specialist in law. He was a professor in the university (i.e. *madrasa*) with many students. He was wealthy. After he met Shams, he did not become a better jurist or a better lawyer. His level of proficiency in positive rational sciences did not change. Instead, he went beyond them.

What emerged after the meeting with Shams was the real Rumi, *quddisa sirruh*. He was a scholar before he met Shams, but after he met Shams, he became a sufi and a lover of Allah.

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* said, "There is no teacher like love!"

"I was raw," he said, referring to the period during which he was merely a scholar. Yet, he described his next state as a lover of Allah also as a scholar with maturity and perfection.

❁

The matter revolves around two questions. What did Shams teach Rumi, *quddisa sirruh*? What did he give him? The answer is that Shams taught him to free himself from the captivity of reason. This is because reason has limits beyond which would be insanity. However, there is no such limit for the heart and the point of its satisfaction is *fanafillah*.

Shams introduced Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* to his own self and to the values he already had hidden within him. He did this for breaking the chain bound to Rumi's foot. Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* was an eagle ready to fly. Shams released his foot and showed him the horizons of his heart.

Afterwards, Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* was bound to burn like a moth circling a flame. Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* narrates his adventure with Shams in his *Divan al-Kabir* as follows:

"Shams said to Rumi, *quddisa sirruh*:

– You are a scholar, a leader, a guide, and an authority!

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* answered:

– I am no longer the scholar, leader, and guide of the external world… I am one of the poor on a journey in the world beyond reason, lit by the torch you sparked.

Shams said again:

– You still maintain rational thinking! Since you could not go beyond reason, you are not a native of this region!

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* responded:

– From now on, I will veil my mind with my heart… I became crazy… With your spiritual guidance, I became a native of this land.

Shams said:

– You still make calculations! You are not intoxicated with love! You are from outside of this world! This world is lit not by mind but by love. You cannot even see what is before you!

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* said to Shams:

– Since that moment, with your spiritual guidance, I became a fire from top to bottom entirely covered by love and ecstasy.

This time Shams said:

– You are the torch of this community! Your place is high.

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* said:

– From now on, my torch is extinguished. In my eye, it is no different from the May beetle. I am now walking under the light of other torches.

Shams said:

– You are not dead. You still maintain your external life. You cannot cross through this door like that to the

other side. You have to completely abandon your mundane existence.

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* answered:

– It was in the past. After I met you, I am no longer alive in the conventional sense. I have died as I have come across a new type of existence.

Shams said to him:

– You still rely on your ego at some points. You still maintain your position and titles. Free yourself from them.

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* replied:

– From now on, I will be seeking position in the divine presence to which you are drawing me. I have abandoned my earlier existence and whatever belongs to it. I have surpassed it all.

Shams said:

– You still have arms and wings! Therefore, I cannot give you new arms and wings!

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* answered:

– From now on, I will break my arms and wings, so that I can become your arms and wings!"

At that moment, Shams was convinced that his mission was over as he had given him wings to travel to the horizons full of divine manifestations... And he left him alone in the world of blissful separation from the world of union.

❁

Muslims gained strength with the conversion of Umar ﷺ. Likewise, his mission regarding Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* brought Shams maturity. Shams, unknown to people

although he was the guide of the world, became renowned as a legendary figure after meeting Rumi, *quddisa sirruh*. The relationship between these two great masters archetypically reflected the relationship between a disciple and a guide.

The gift Shams gave to Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* consisted of abstention, longing, and love, the best examples of which can be seen in the lives of Abu Bakr and Fatima ﷺ.

Abu Bakr's ecstasy increased in every meeting with the Prophet ﷺ. He felt an increasing love and longing for the Prophet ﷺ even in his presence.

The crown of lovers and the mother of believers, Fatima, said after the journey of the Prophet ﷺ to the next world: "When the Prophet ﷺ traveled to the next world, such a great sorrow covered me that it would have changed the color of darkness if darkness had been afflicted by it."

Likewise, when Shams died, the separation from him burned within Rumi, *quddisa sirruh*. The great *Mathnawi* with its twenty six thousand couplets was a consequence of this separation and longing.

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* has beautifully illustrated the secret of separation as follows:

*Listen to the flute that represents one with wisdom,*

*Drink the ecstasy of its complaints about separation.*

The *Mathnawi* can be seen as poetry about separation. Since *Noor-i Muhammadi* (i.e. the light of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ) extended to Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* through Shams, his death indeed was a great separation for Rumi, *quddisa sirruh*.

Since he was guided by Shams to the endless ocean of meaning, he longed for him all his life. He was like *Majnun* (i.e. the legendary lover who went crazy) whose destiny was to burn with love for Layla.

When someone said, "Shams is living", Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* gave him everything he had on him. His friends told him that it was a lie. Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* said to them:

– This is what I gave for the lie of it. If I were to hear true news of him, I would give my life.

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* expressed the fire of separation in his heart as follows:

*Why does my inner world cry and moan?*

*Who can sympathize with my pain?*

*Everyone listens to me according to his potential and inclination. The corrupt one understands me by combining what he hears with his own feelings. The traveler on the path of Allah increases in his spirituality and in the ecstasy of his feelings. The flute becomes a medicine for him.*

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* has articulated in the *Mathnawi* that it is his desire that those who listen to the flute reach through its voice to higher feelings. He said:

*Listen to the flute what it is saying. It is disclosing the hidden secrets of Allah. Its face becomes pale, its inside is empty, its head is cut off, it is left only to the breath of the Nayzan (the one who blows the flute) and screams "Allah, Allah" without tongue or language.*

The flute symbolizes the people of love and passion because it is uprooted from the riverbed, its chest is burned with fire, and holes are made in it. Metal rings are put

around it as if it was a prisoner. Therefore, its color becomes pale and yellow.

For this reason, the flute, speaking with the language of the body, says:

*"I was in the riverbed. My roots and heart were connected to the water and the soil. There, I was waving with happiness in the wind. Yet a time came, when they removed me from riverbed. They dried my body with the fire of love and made holes in it. They opened several wounds in my body. Later, they gave me to a person with a blessed breath. His warm breath passed through me and burned to dissolution everything except love. It melted me in itself. I began crying and disclosed all my secrets.*

*Briefly, my secrets turned to sounds. Yet those whose eyes, ears and hearts are closed are far removed and are deprived of these secrets."*

People are also like that.

They were also brought to this world from the divine world and put under the chains of being human. Their hearts were also burned and wounded by this separation.

Yet, this truth which exists in every human being becomes manifest when one becomes a perfect human, *insan-i kamil*. This means it becomes apparent at the level of the mind.

The perfect human is the one who sees divine wisdom and the flow of divine secrets everywhere he looks. Is it possible not to burn in the flames of love after witnessing divine secrets and divine art?

For this reason, Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* lamented those who failed to become perfect humans and thus failed to

rise to understand divine secrets. Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* appeared as if he was on fire. Yunus, who was blessed with a similar experience, said:

*I became a strange person,*
*No one comprehends my state,*
*I chant and I alone listen to myself,*
*No one understands my language.*
*My language is the language of birds,*
*My homeland is the country of the beloved,*
*I am a nightingale; my beloved is my rose,*
*To be sure, the color of my rose never fades.*

In the same manner, Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* expressed his feelings and his search to find consolation in the verse below:

*The Seven Sleepers (Ashab al-Kahf) were put to sleep because they were surrounded by a senseless group of people who did not understand them. When a genuinely spiritual group of people emerged, they were awakened.*

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* was so concerned with being correctly understood that he warned his readers in the introduction to the *Mathnawi*:

*There is only permission to touch this Mathnawi for those who have a refined and clean heart and are acquainted with truth.*

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* was, as many other travelers on the path of truth, disturbed by those who misunderstood his words and reported them wrongly. He warned them with the verses below:

*As long as I carry this soul in my body,*

*I will remain a humble servant of the Qur'an,*

*I will be the soil of the path of the chosen Muhammad.*

*Whosoever incorrectly conveys my words,*

*Know that I am far from him and far from his words!*

❁

This great friend of Allah proclaimed that the night of his death would be the night of his wedding since on that night, he would be emancipated from this world of separation and his union with Allah would take place.

*When you see my coffin being carried after my death, do not think that I have any worldly concern.*

*Never cry for me; never say 'separation!'-'separation!' when I am buried,*

*The grave is a curtain, beyond which there is the tranquility of Paradise,*

*Have you not seen the sunset? Watch the sun rise, too. Can the sunset inflict any harm on the sun or on the moon?*

*Which seed did not grow after it was sown in the soil? Do not worry that the human seed will not grow.*

*Do not think that I am buried in the soil. There are Seven Heavens beneath my foot.*

The soul of the author of these lines reached beyond doubt to his Lord, passing through Seven Heavens.

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* said in another poem:

*O my soul mate! You carry a treasure hidden by the curtain of soil. There are hundreds of beautiful faces like Yusuf in that unseen world.*

*When the form of the body is buried, the form of the soul remains alone,*

*The form of the body is transient, but the form of the soul is permanent,*

*Indeed, death is the birth pain of the soul to another world. Its name is death regarding this transient world, but it is a birth relative to the eternal world.*

*Is not the one who takes the soul, Allah? To be sure, death is as sweet as sugar for the intimate servants of Allah.*

*Therefore, death is a rose garden and an elixir for the friends of Allah even if it looks like a fire.*

*What makes death look scary is the cage of the body. If you break it like the shell of the mother-of-pearl, you will see that death is as a pearl.*

❁

One of the most significant characteristics of the friends of Allah is that they burn with the love of Allah. In another verse, Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* explained that the fire of separation from Allah in his soul would not be extinguished even by his death.

*After I die, open my grave and see how smoke is rising from my shroud because of the fire in it.*

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* who lived in such a state of love, looked for similar lovers during his lifetime:

*I need a love in which the world should be dismantled in fire, and even the fire of your heart should turn the fire into dust! The heavens should look at its light, which is brighter than the sun, and say 'Mashallah!', 'Mashallah!' (fantastic!)*

Similarly, the great Sufi master Es'ad Erbili illustrated, in the following couplet, the spiritual state of those who attain to such love:

*In such flames, is it possible to wash the martyr of love?*

*The body is fire, the shroud is fire, and even the sweet water is fire…*

In his deathbed, a lover of Allah was asked:

– How can you laugh at the moment of death?

The lover of Allah answered:

– I fly for joy as if all my body has become smiling lips! Now, the smile of lips is different than ever before.

Rumi said:

*Do not compare those who do not smile at the moment of death to a candle! Only those who melt like a candle in the path of love will be able to spread smells like amber.*

Rumi passed from this mundane world to the divine world smiling with the lips of his soul as he reached the Night of Wedding (*Shab-i Arus*), for which he had been longing his entire life.

His community was crying after him, but in the coffin, the traveler who was going to unite with his Beloved was smiling.

Sultan Walad, the son of Rumi, described as follows the funeral of his father in his book *Ibtida-name*:

*The glorious sultan traveled from this world in 672 according to the Hijra calendar (1273 CE). The hearts moaned. Even the non-Muslim neighborhoods were crying. Every pure person was loyal to him; the followers of all religions were in love with him.*

*The people said:*

*– He is the light of Prophet Muhammad and he who carries his secrets. He is the endless ocean of virtues.*

*On that day, no one found tranquility without crying. Everyone said in great sorrow:*

*– He was a great treasure! He has hidden himself under the soil.*

Eflaki, an historian of that time, reported that the coffin in which Rumi's body was carried broke because of the crowd and had to be replaced six times. Although his funeral began at noon, it only reached the gravesite at sunset.

Doctor Ekmeluddin was reminding people:

– Behave yourselves! Observe good manners during the funeral. This is the sultan of the real sheikhs; he has traveled to the other world…

As Rumi had requested in his will, *Sheikh* Sadruddin Konawi came in front of the coffin to lead the funeral prayer, but he could not stop crying. He was about to faint. They held him in their arms and took him aside. Judge Sirajuddin took his place and led the funeral prayer.

Rumi summarized his life in the expression: "I was raw, I was cooked and I was burned". On another occasion, he illustrated it as follows:

*I was dead, yet became alive,*

*I was a tear, yet became a smile,*

*I entered the ocean of love,*

*And I reached eternal happiness!*

The Sufi poet Yunus Emre also expressed it very well:

*The body is transient, yet the soul is eternal,*
*Those who went before us will not come back,*
*What dies is but the body,*
*The soul never knows death.*

O Lord! Make our death too a bridge to eternal happiness. May our death too become a night of union with the Beloved, a Shab-i Arus.

Amen!

# An Urn of Water

*As the good-looking look at a mirror,*
*The generous look at the weak and the poor!*
*Mirrors reflect the beauty in the face of the good-looking;*
*The poor reflect the beauty of generosity and giving.*

Rumi

One night a bedouin woman said to her husband as she carried her talk beyond bounds:

– While we are suffering all this poverty and hardship, the whole world is living in happiness. We alone are unhappy. We have no bread; our only condiment is anguish and envy. We have no urn of water and our only water is to be found in the teardrops flowing from our eyes. Our garment by day is the burning sunshine, at night our bed and coverlet are made of moonbeams. We fancy the disk of the moon to be a round disk of bread and lift up our hands towards the sky. The poorest of the poor feel shame at our poverty; as day is turned to night darkened by our anxiety borne of our meager daily portion of food. Kinsfolk and strangers have come to flee from us as gazelles flee from men.

The bedouin bade his wife to be patient and in a state of contentment declared to her the excellence of patience and poverty as follows:

– How long will you seek income and worldly possessions? What indeed is left of our life? Most of it has past. The sensible man does not look at sufficiency or deficiency, because both will pass as a torrent. Whether life be pure, clear and untroubled or whether it be a turbid flood, do not speak of it, since it is not enduring for even a moment. In this world, thousands of animals are living happily, without need of the anxieties of gain and loss. These uprooting grievances are as a scythe to us: to judge that this is such and such or that that is such and such is a temptation of the Devil. Know that every pain is borne of desire; expel desire from you if there is but a means to do so. You were once young, and then you were more content; now you have become a seeker of gold, whereas at first you were indeed precious and perfect gold yourself. You were a fruitful wine. How have you succeeded in becoming rotten when your fruit was but ripening? Fruit ought to become sweeter with age!

The wife cried out at him saying:

– O you, who has made a reputation of his morals, I will not swallow your spells and deceiving speeches any more. Do not talk nonsense in your presumption and pretension; be gone, do not speak from pride and arrogance. How long will you continue to utter such pompous and artificial phrases? Look at your own acts and feelings and be ashamed! I say enough of this palaver, pretense, and bluster, O you, whose house is as frail as the house of a spider? When has your soul been illumined by contentment? Of contentment, you know no more than the name. Do not call me your spouse; do not flap your lips so much. I am the mate of justice; I am not the mate of fraud.

The husband answered calmly:

– O woman! Are you a woman or the father of sorrow? Poverty is my pride. Do not beat me on the head, as you lash me with your reproaches. Wealth and gold are as a hat on the head. One must be bold to make a shelter of his cap, but he that has curly and beautiful locks is happier when his cap is gone. The wealthy that are up to their brim in faults cover them with their money. Poverty is something you do not understand! Do not disdain poverty. In the eyes of the prophets and the saints, it is perceived as a blessing. This poverty draws me closer to Allah. May Allah protect me from desire for this material world! I carry in my heart a world made of contentment. O woman! Leave aside fighting as you abandon destroying our relationship. Otherwise, leave me alone. My soul even shies away from reconciliation, let alone fights. It would be better for you to be silent. Otherwise, I may leave home right away…

Having heard the words of separation, the wife saw that he was fierce and unmanageable. She began to weep, but tears in sooth are a woman's lure. She approached him in the guise of self-naughting and self-abasement:

– I am as your dust, not worthy to be thy lady-wife. Body and soul and all I am, is yours: the authority and the command belongs to you alone. If because of poverty my heart has lost patience, it is not for my own sake, but for yours. You have been my remedy for all afflictions; I am unwilling that you should be penniless. On my soul and conscience, this is not for my own sake: this wailing and moaning is only for you. Have mercy free of self-conceit O

angry one, O you whose nature is better than a hundred mounds of honey.

In this fashion, as she was speaking graciously and winningly, a fit of weeping came upon her and when the tears and sobs had passed beyond all bounds, from her who was fascinating even in repose, there appeared from that rain a lightning-flash that shot a spark of fire into the heart of the lonely man. She, through whose beauteous face man was enslaved, led him to ponder how it would be when she began to play the humble slave. The man yielded to his wife's request that he should seek a means of livelihood, and regarded her opposition to him as a divine sign.

The wife, observing the change in her husband, said:

– We have the rainwater in the urn: it is your property, capital, and means. Take this urn of water and depart, and make of it a gift and go into the presence of the King of kings. Say, "We have no means except this: in the desert there is nothing better than water. Although your treasury is full of gold and jewels, you have never seen the likes of water like this. It is rare."

The wife did not know that in Baghdad, near the thoroughfare, a great river of water sweet as sugar flows as a sea, full of boats and fishnets, through the city center. She sewed the jug of rainwater in a felt cloth and put a seal on it because of her utter conviction that it was a precious gift for the Caliph.

The husband said:

– Yes, stop up the mouth of the urn. Take care for this is a gift that will bring us great profit. Sew this urn in felt,

that the Caliph may break his fast with our gift, for there is no water like this in the entire world. No other water is as pure as this.

When the bedouin arrived from the remote desert at the gate of the Caliph's palace, the court officers went to meet him and they generously sprinkled a rose water of graciousness on his bosom. Without him having said even a word, they had perceived what he wanted. It was their practice to give before being asked. He then proceeded to say to them:

– O respected people! I am a miserable bedouin. I have come all this way to the palace for the sake of dinars. When I arrived, I fell into drunkenness at its sight (i.e. contemplative). Bear this gift to the Sultan, and redeem the king's suitor from indigence. It is sweet water in a new green urn– some of the rainwater that we collected in the ditch.

The officials smiled and accepted the urn in a magnanimous gesture as though it was as precious as life. Clearly, the graciousness of the good and wise Caliph had made a mark and impressed itself on the characters of the courtiers. The Caliph accepted the gift and bestowed largess, notwithstanding that he was entirely without need of the gift of water and the urn. He ordered:

– Give into his hand this urn full of gold. When he returns home, take him to the Tigris. He has come hither by way of the desert, by traveling on land: it will be easier for him to return by water.

When the bedouin embarked on the boat and beheld the Tigris, he prostrated himself in shame and bowed his

head, saying, "Oh, how wonderful is the kindness of that bounteous king. It is even more remarkable that he has accepted the water. How did that sea of munificence so generously accept from me such a spurious tidbit?"

❁

**THE MATHNAWI:**

*Know, O son that everything in the visible universe is as an urn filled to the brim with wisdom and beauty. Know too, that everything in this universe is but a drop of the Tigris of His beauty. This beauty was a hidden treasure that because of its fullness overflowed and made the earth brighter than the heavens. As it surged up it made the soil like a Sultan robed in satin. However, if the bedouin had but seen a drop of the divine Tigris, he would have immediately destroyed his urn. They that have seen it, always lose themselves: like one beside himself, they hurl a stone at the urn of their self-existence. Of you who from jealousy have hurled stones at the urn, know that the urn has only been raised to a higher perfection through being shattered. The jar is shattered, but the water does not spill from it: from this shattering its soundness has increased a hundred fold. Every piece of the jar is in a dance of ecstasy, though to the partial discursive reason this may seem absurd. In this state of ecstasy, is neither the urn, nor the water manifest. Consider well, and Allah knows best what is right.*

In the story the bedouin represents the spiritual intellect while his wife represents desire (i.e. the *nafs*). The intellect and the *nafs* are always engaged in a struggle with each other. Both of them reside in the kingdom of the body.

They continuously fight day and night. The woman who represents the *nafs* articulates the needs of the body; she wants honor, status, appreciation, clothes and food. Occasionally, she shows humility to reach to her goals. Sometimes she puts her face on the ground to gain mercy; sometimes she acts arrogantly as she rises to the zenith.

The spiritual intellect, however, is unaware of the thoughts of the body. It is preoccupied only with the love of Allah. It is overwhelmed by the agony and fear of the possibility of losing the love of Allah.

The Caliph in the story is the Tigris of divine knowledge. The bedouin who took an urn of water to the Tigris is pardonable because he did not know it. He resided in a desert far removed from the Tigris. If he had known about the Tigris, he would not have carried the urn in the desert. Instead, he would have thrown it on the rocks and broken it into pieces as he strove to clean his heart and purify it by following the order of the Prophet ﷺ to "die before you die" through absorption in the aim to discover the divine Tigris.

The woman who represents the *nafs* and the bedouin who represents the spiritual intellect have not yet realized that the real value and pleasure is in the water of divine knowledge and that tasting it is dependent on obtaining a share of it from the ocean of divine wisdom.

"The gate of the Caliph," on the other hand, represents the "divine gate."

A believer should never rely on knowledge, property, wealth, or good deeds regardless of how abundant they may be. He should look at all of these as but gifts from Allah and keep in his mind the realization that regardless of

how many good deeds one might perform, they are but only an urn of water beside the Tigris.

The water, which was collected in the desert by the bedouin with great perseverance that was presented to the Caliph, was his life elixir. Nevertheless, when it was poured into the Tigris it was effaced in it.

The sum a human being understands of the divine order is less than but a drop of the Tigris when compared to the scope of its true vastness. The urn of water in the story represents our limited knowledge. Yet, since we are unaware of the endless knowledge of Allah, we think that our knowledge is broad and comprehensive. This is similar to an ant that likens his mound to the whole world, or to a fish, that likens his aquarium to a huge ocean. It would be an act of vast self-deception, due to his incognizance of his dwarf like size, for a human being to think in the fashion of the ant or fish just mentioned.

When the urn of existence is shattered, the water in it is filtered, and becomes transparent and clear. Exceptional manifestations emerge out of this shattering.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "O my Lord! I glorify you and declare that you are beyond any imperfection. We can not know you the way you deserve to be known!"

The classical scholars of this sublime religion have also confessed that their knowledge was deeply limited. Imam Abu Yusuf was consulted on an issue by the Caliph Harun al-Rashid. Imam Abu Yusuf answered by saying, "I do not know." The assistant to the Caliph said to Abu Yusuf: "You have a salary and you say you do not know." In response, the great scholar Abu Yusuf said: "My salary is according to

my knowledge. If it were according to my ignorance, the treasury of the state would not suffice."

The great scholar Imam Ghazali also was not afraid to acknowledge his weakness with great humility: "If I were to put the matters that I do not know under my foot, in contrast to what I know, my head would touch the sky."

These great figures did not refrain from confessing that what they did not know far exceeded what they knew.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ described fallen and divinely realized states of knowledge as follows: "Knowledge is as three spans of hand. The one who reaches the first span feels proud. The one who grows to the second span is amazed. The one who attains to the third span realizes that he does not have enough knowledge."

Are not the good deeds one inclines to rely on as but an urn of water in comparison to the Tigris River? Allah forbid, similar to a sky covered by dark clouds which block the light of the sun, if the heart becomes a throne for the Devil, how will the light of the Most Merciful Creator reach it? Since a human being may not know the Tigris, one might confuse an urn of water for an ocean and drown in it. Just such people are lost in their illusions.

❁

Junayd al-Baghdadi came across a man who was selling ice. The ice vendor was shouting as follows:

– Help the man whose capital is melting!

When Junayd al-Baghdadi heard this, he fainted and fell to the ground.

If we cannot transform our worldly investments into investments in the Hereafter, our mundane efforts will be

but shares in the hands of Satan. The outcome will be a painful illusion. The craziness of extravagance and the absence of mercy are among the greatest problems of this world, and they function as investments in our punishment in the Hereafter. The files on our past are closed. There is no possibility to make revisions in them. The nature of our existence in the future is uncertain. The moment is now. If we use the drops of sweat of our heart to water the good deeds we plant in the field of our life today, Allah willing, excellent stations will be ours in Paradise. This is what the famous Sufi poet Sadi has stated in the following verse:

*"The face of earth is the open table of the Lord."*

In the world, all creatures are fed abundantly as a manifestation of the divine name *ar-Rahman*, the Most Merciful. They are all given food, drink and covering. No distinction is made between friend and enemy, those loyal and those rebelious. The infinite mercy of Allah embraces all creatures.

Among the manifestations of this comprehensive mercy is the love of the porcupine for its baby and the acceptance of the prayers of the oppressed even if they are non-Muslims. The rationality, wisdom and divine art or creation will fill the heart of anyone, whose nature has not been spoiled, with reverence for the glory of the divine, with love of solitude in company with Allah, as well as with purity and softness of heart.

Nevertheless, Allah's most delicate blessings are saved for the Hereafter. These are the manifestations of the name *ar-Rahim*, the Most Compassionate, and will be kept exclusively for the believers.

At this exclusive table of blessings, Paradise and "the witnessing of the beauty of Allah" (*ru'yati jamalullah*) will be offered. These are the greatest blessings a human may be granted. Since a human being is a perfect and complete manifestation of the divine names, he is a small manifestation of the entirety of creation. His physical structure has originated from soil. It is the external dimension of his existence, and is but a temporary structure. His real existence is a hidden treasure of secrets, made up of divine light and divine truth. This is the blessed dimension of a human being. For him to attain a share from the ocean of knowledge, which is the purpose of his creation, depends on his connection with this dimension. Hallaj-i Mansoor shed his temporary existence in the ocean of secrets. His act reminds us of a moth that falls in love with light even at the expense of being burned. Mansoor was consumed in the fire of the manifestations of the divine. His soul rose and became immersed in divine knowledge, his *nafs* lost strength until it was completely extinguished. He became an alien to himself and tried to free himself from his self. Yet he was unable to carry these heavy manifestations. He became intoxicated and exclaimed:

– O my friends! Kill me! My eternal life is in my death.

The only thing that wounded him was a carnation thrown by a friend while he was being stoned. Even such a small worldly appreciation and a smile were too heavy for him.

In other words, his spiritual state is an expression of attaining to eternity and completely submitting temporary existence to that of the eternal.

Similar to the existence of a drop of water that is lost on contact with the sea, the one who dies in the sea of eternity does not see anything other than the eternal.

Those who reach to this level see everything including their own self as a reflection of divine truth. Yet, it is only a spiritual state. When it is over, one recognizes the distinction between the divine and the transient.

The following hadith explains this spiritual state with an example: "Those who wish to see a living-dead being in this world should look at Abu Bakr."

The great Caliph Umar ﷺ who was a statue of mercy and justice, ordered his servant to ride their only camel when they entered the city of Damascus because it was his turn. He entered the city on foot. The people thought that the servant was the Caliph.

After the Caliph Umar passed away his friends saw him in their dreams. They asked him:

– How has the Lord treated you?

He said:

– Thanks be to Allah; my Lord is the Most Merciful and the Most Compassionate.

❁

The great teacher Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* said:

"Since poverty is a mirror for generosity, be aware and know that it is harmful to blow on the mirror."

This means that words that insult a poor, miserable person break his heart. His heart becomes unclear like a mirror that has been blown on. It loses its clarity and depth. Consequently, it cannot reflect the beauty of generosity.

Usually our good deeds, sacrifice and donations appear to be substantial to us. This mistaken impression deceives us and engages our mind. It fills us with contentment. Since we are unaware of the Tigris and its Owner, a mere urn of water appears to be an ocean to us.

Our mundane desires never cease. We presume that what we own is our natural birthright. When we are asked to make a sacrifice our behavior changes as if we have been asked for something from our own personal possessions. Consequently, the bright, crystal clear and delicate mirror of trustworthiness and generosity becomes stained.

However, as Almighty Allah has revealed in the Qur'an: **"As to the orphan do not oppress him. Nor refuse the one who asks for help"** (Duha, 9-10)**.**

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* said:

*Just as physically beautiful people search for bright and clear mirrors, for generosity to be seen poor and powerless people are required. As a beautiful person's face may be reflected in a mirror, so too the beauty of those who help the needy through their generosity is reflected in the poor and the miserable.*

The mirror may enslave those who are good-looking as they perpetually return in their narcissism to confirm their beauty. They may even look in stained windows to see themselves as they pass by. Generosity, which is our original spiritually rooted beauty, watches itself in the mirror of the heart of the poor and the miserable.

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* said:

*"Thus, the poor are the mirror of divine mercy and generosity. Those who are with Allah or lost in the existence of Allah are in a state of continuous generosity."*

❁

*Tafsir-i Hazin,* a commentary on the Qur'an, reports the following from the great companion Jabir:

*A small child came to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. He told him that his mother had asked for a shirt. At that time the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ owned only the shirt that he was wearing. He told the child to come back another time. The child returned to his home. But, soon he came back and told the Prophet ﷺ that his mother wanted the shirt he was wearing. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ went to his room, took off his shirt and gave it to the child.*

*At that moment, Bilal, the muadhdhin of the Prophet ﷺ began reciting the Adhan, or the call to prayer. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ could not come out of his room to lead the communal prayer because he did not have a shirt. Some of the companions came to his room since they were worried about him and they discovered that the Prophet ﷺ no longer had a shirt to wear.*

❁

Wealth is a trust of Allah given to our care. The only way to enjoy it and feel happy about it is by sympathizing with the suffering of the needy by opening a window of mercy and compassion from our heart to them.

The great Rumi said:

*Act like the sun in mercy and compassion!*

*Act like the night in covering the mistakes of others!*

*Act like a river in generosity and sacrifice!*

*Act like a dead one in anger and fury!*

*Act like the soil in humility and selflessness!*

*Act in accordance with the way you look!*

*Look in accordance with the way you act!*

We should keep in mind that regardless how one presents oneself, what will come out of him is what he has in the urn of his heart. It is true that many urns that have claimed to be full of love have only produced eventually the water of indiscretion and heedlessness. Likewise, many people who have spoken about the elixir, or the water of life, could not drink a drop of it nor could they offer any to others. On the other hand, many people who hide themselves in humility and externally look like empty urns are special servants of Allah and carry endless oceans in their hearts. And they unhesitatingly offer water to burning lovers like the water of al-Kawthar, a river in Paradise.

May Allah raise all of us to be of His sincere and pure-hearted servants, so that we may too offer to all of humanity drops from the water of al-Kawthar and Tasnim[2] while still in this world.

Amen!

2. al-Kawthar (literally, 'The Abundant') is a river of Jannah and Tasnim (literally, 'Nectar') is a spring of Jannah.

# From the Mirror of the Heart

*Those who have pure hearts are freed from colors and smells.*
*They easily see a beauty in every breath.*
*They have left behind the decoration in the shell of knowledge.*
*Instead, they carry the flag of certainty of a witness.*

Rumi

The Chinese said, "We are the better artists"; the Turks said, "The superiority in power and excellence belongs to us."

"I will put you to the test in this matter," said the Sultan, "and see which of you holds true in your claim."

The Chinese and the Turks began to debate: the Turks retired from the debate.

(Then) the Chinese said, "Hand over to us a particular room, and (let there be) one for you (as well)."

There were two rooms with their doors facing each other: the Chinese took one, and the Turks took the other.

The Chinese requested that the Sultan give them a hundred colors: the Sultan opened his treasury so that they could receive that (which they sought).

Every morning, by (his) bounty, the colors were dispensed from the treasury to the Chinese.

The Turks said, "No tints and colors are proper for our work, (nothing is needed) except to remove the rust."

They shut the door and went on burnishing: the room became clear and pure like the sky.

There is a way from many-coloredness to colorlessness: color is like the cloud, and colorlessness is as the moon.

Whatsoever light and splendor you see in the clouds, know that it comes from the stars, the sun and the moon.

When the Chinese had finished their work, they were beating their drums for joy. The Sultan entered and observed the pictures: that (sight), as he encountered it, was of such beauty that it almost caused him to lose his wits.

After that, he proceeded towards the Turks. They removed the intervening curtain.

The reflection of the (Chinese) pictures and works (of art) shone upon these walls that had been made pure (from stain).

All that he had seen in the Chinese room seemed more beautiful here: it was as if it was snatching his eyes from their sockets. The Turks, o father, are the Sufis: (They are) without (independent of) study and books and erudition,

However, they have burnished their breasts, (made them) pure from lust, hatred, conceit, arrogance, avarice, greed and all other sorts of worldly desires.

The purity of the mirror is beyond doubt the heart that is capable of receiving innumerable images.

Allah the Exalted had ordered Musa عليه السلام:

"O Musa! Put your hand in your bosom. Let it come out perfect and pure white."

Musa عليه السلام obeyed the order and his hand was seen as white as the "sun of the world" and radiating light. The reason for this is that Musa عليه السلام held in his bosom the infinite formlessness of the Unseen and it was reflected in the mirror of his heart. When Musa عليه السلام extended his hand into his bosom, by elevating it above all but the divine art, his hand became as a pure white light shining with a halo of divine light.

The grand infinite formlessness that was reflected in the heart of Musa عليه السلام can't fit into the empyrean, the sphere of the stars, nor the sphere of the earth resting on the Fish because these are but bounded countable entities that have countable limits. It is impossible for the unlimited to fit into the limited. That is why the unlimited essences and attributes may only be reflected in a heart that has been polished and freed from all kinds of worldly impurity. Know that the abode of the mirror of the heart carries the attribute of boundlessness just as the beauty of the divine mystery that may be reflected in it. The mirror of the heart filled with the manifestations of its Lord is a place where the infinite is reflected.

The reflection of every image shines unto everlasting from the heart alone, both with plurality and without,

Unto everlasting, every new image that falls on it (the heart) is appearing therein without any imperfection.

Those who have burnished (their hearts) have escaped from (mere) scent and colour: they behold Beauty at every moment without delay.

They have relinquished the form and husk of knowledge; they have raised the banner of the eye of certainty (*ayne'l yakin*).

❁

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said: "After I pass away, I am concerned for my *Ummah* in relation to three things:

1. The deviations of being ensnared by desires and passions,

2. Being obediant to the lust of the stomach and to women,

3. And being in a state of heedlessness after having gained knowledge…"

Knowledge (*ilm*) relies on books, but wisdom or divine knowledge (*'irfan*) is its internalization and perfection. For this reason, those who do not elevate their knowledge to *ma'rifah* (divine knowledge) face the dangers of superficiality and dryness. The universe when observed through the eye of the heart is full of subtle purposes and delicate wisdom, and this world, in all its states, is as a classroom for learning faith and it is filled with tests for achieving proficiency in this aim. Ultimately, only as we succeed in this aim and the eye of our heart opens can the latent goal of our creation be revealed to us in its full brilliance.

Those who fail in their divine aim and loose their decency in this world in the turbulence of its extravagance, in spite of the presence of divine guidance, are the real losers. They lose their divine inheritance, their inherent essential disposition, and are orphans of the true life and of happiness. They lose stature, become depressed, and finally find themselves consumed in the whirlpool of desires.

Allah the Most High announced the inescapability of the Hereafter in the following verses: **"No!... They will know! Truly, they will know!"** (Naba 4-5)**.**

That Allah has sent prophets to teach humanity and to assist them through the example of their speech, knowledge, guidance, and morality is a manifestation of divine generosity and providence.

If a human being would sincerely pause and look around himself with a keen eye, he would immediately comprehend that his very existence is an ongoing confrontation with a visible and undeniably vast power. With his every breath under its hegemony, it would be absurd and useless to lead a life denying the Hereafter.

Anyone with reason who stops to contemplate the ultimate end of this life will clearly realize that it is essential in the nature of creation for us to limit our boundless desires and fleeting passions, while simultaneously re-directing our love towards the divine purpose hidden within our existence.

The expressions depicted in calligraphy that are posted on the walls of mosques and Sufi lodges (*tekke*) serve both as signals of truth and as warnings. Examples of these sayings are: "Show tolerance for the sake of Allah", "This too shall pass", "Be careful in your manners", and finally "Nothing." Each utterance ends with the statement "*Ya Hu*", where "*Ya Hu*" means, "O Allah!" Their detailed meanings are discussed below.

❁

The injunction, "Show tolerance for the sake of Allah," means to not hurt any creature while at the same time aiming towards not being hurt by any creature. This is a

natural consequence of purity of heart. A poet has aptly expressed this as follows:

This is the objective of humans and jinns in the garden of the world,

To neither hurt anyone, nor to be hurt by anyone.

From another perspective, it means, "Abandon the world of causality and be content with the pleasure of the divine will."

Yet it must be remembered that the tolerance cited here is for those mistakes the Lord forgives. Beyond the bounds of these actions, sins and acts of corruption deliberately and openly committed in society cannot be tolerated! Mischievous behavior arises from a lack of appreciation of Allah's gifts, which provokes the wrath of the Lord.

❁

The expression, "This shall too pass," articulates the following: "O human! The sorrows and joys that come to you are but guests. Do not think that they are permanent!" Do not be disturbed by life's sorrows, because they will go. Do not be too happy with the joys of life, because they too will not last forever. That is, you are a guesthouse and your guests for but a few days are alternatively sorrows and joys.

The subjects of your guesthouse, that make you upset, do not belong only to you. They also belong to those who will follow you. They are like transferable property. Therefore, they are not worthy of the fixed attention that can lead to drowning yourself in a sea of sorrow.

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* said:

"O seeker of the Truth! Be happy if you have sorrows! They are the tricks of reunion that the Beloved has set for you since one remembers Allah and seeks refuge in Him when one is overcome by sorrow."

"Sorrow is a treasure. Your illnesses and the other troubles you face are all treasures."

"Likewise, sorrow is as a blessed wind that blows on the mirror of the heart to clear the dust from it; never compare it with harmful winds."

"In this path of love, no one but grief remembers me, thousands of thanks to it."

Another poet who has understood this secret strove to explain it in the couplet below. The poem expresses that everything that comes from the Beloved is a blessing; even sorrows exist for thousands of good reasons. They are prepared by the Beloved to distinguish between false lovers whose only capital is their pretension and talk, and real lovers who are lost in Him:

*"The unkindness of the Beloved is but an expression of loyalty, not cruelty;*

*The one who blames his Beloved with unkindness is not a true lover!"*

This is because the sorrows and pains common people perceive as punishment are in fact divine gifts in the eye of the lover of Allah. Sad hearts remember Allah more. They gain nourishment from the fountain of submission. And Allah blesses their hearts with lasting happiness by granting them exceptional gifts because of this spiritual dependence and intimacy.

Based on this essential truth, Rumi warns the seekers of wisdom as follows:

"O nightingale! How long will you continue to cry because it is winter? O nightingale! Is it appropriate to continuously cry out of abuse? If your heart is truly tied to your Beloved, open your eyes and be grateful; mention the loyalty. Speak of the rose, instead of the bush. Disregard the roots and the body of the rose, concentrate on its personality! Why are you so preoccupied with this temporary world? Is not your final destination the beyond of the beyond?"

❁

The saying "*Adab Ya Hu!*" means, "Behave well for the pleasure of Allah!" and calls a person to follow the rules of spiritual etiquette in his behavior.

Spiritual etiquette is the zenith of morality. It is one of the goals of *tasawwuf*. The first etiquette to learn is towards Allah. It pertains to transforming an immature person into a perfect human being, by teaching him how to behave well towards his Creator. The second rule of etiquette is in relation to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Allah calls the believers to behave well particularly towards his Messenger in the *Surah Hujurat* and in other *surahs*.

The principles of spiritual etiquette, as one's understanding of it grows towards perfection, expand to embrace our behavior towards teachers, parents, and other believers until they have widened to the point of enveloping all creatures.

Sufyan Thawri said: "Good etiquette extinguishes Allah's anger."

Ibn Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him and with his father, said: "The first principle of etiquette is to follow the orders of Allah and to stay away from what he has prohibited in both difficult and comfortable times."

It is also said that "There are three qualities which if cultivated will protect one from being deprived of divine blessing:

1. To have good etiquette;
2. To be with the ones who have good etiquette;
3. To not hurt others."

A poet has illustrated good etiquette as follows:

*"Etiquette is a crown from the light of Allah,*

*Put on this crown, and you will be protected from all troubles!"*

Yunus Emre expressed this truth in a couplet:

*"I sought for knowledge amongst the people of good hearts, and came to know that,*

*On the condition of the presence of etiquette, the etiquette, all occupations are acceptable."*

Based on this sophisticated principle, some of the friends of Allah have defined *tasawwuf* as 'etiquette alone'.

Khatam al-Asamm has used the following instructive example:

He was talking to a woman. She was physically weak, looked miserable and seemed destined to an ill fate. While she was trying to explain her problem in a highly nervous manner, an ugly sound came from her. She was so embarrassed that it was as if she was a melting candle

about to extinguish. Suddenly, there was a deafening silence. The Sheikh turned to the woman, looked at her, and said in a serene way:

– I have a hearing problem; I cannot hear well what you say. Please speak loudly. Shout! I am deaf.

With her shame veiled, the woman found her composure restored. This incident, the likes of which has not been seen elsewhere, led those who knew him to give him the nickname *'asamm'*, which means 'deaf'. This is an example of advanced Islamic etiquette and spiritual kindness. After this incident, the great scholar Khatam continued to behave as if he was deaf so that the woman would not discover the reality of what had happened and yet again feel ashamed. He went on this way until the woman died. When she died, Khatam told the people around him:

– Now my ears hear well. You can speak in a normal voice.

The examples of refined etiquette are countless in the lives of the friends of Allah. Through the course of their lives, they have embodied the example of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. For instance, Ibn Ata said concerning obedience to the rules of etiquette:

"Whoever adopts the etiquette of the people of pure heart, his carpet is the carpet of blessings. Whoever adopts the etiquette of the friends of Allah, his carpet is a carpet reflecting the spiritual states of friendship with Allah. Whoever adopts the etiquette of the prophets, his carpet is the carpet of intimacy with Allah. And, whoever is barren of good etiquette, he is deprived of all good things."

The great master Rumi said:

"Whoever has not a share of etiquette, he is not a human being. This is because the difference between a human and an animal is in etiquette. Open your eyes and read the Qur'an, the Book of Allah, more carefully. You will realize that its verses are all about good etiquette."

❁

The word "nothing" indicates freedom from the ego. This is because the first step in realizing a share of the divine secrets begins with rising above egotistical behavior and animal desires. Therefore, a preliminary point in the process of spiritual growth is when one attains to the degree of being "nothing."

One of the purposes of *tasawwuf* is to prepare a disciple for witnessing his 'nothingness' before the glory, kingdom and omnipotence of the divine. Allah occasionally reminds his servants of this truth through various trials. For instance, he left one of his great prophets, Sulaiman ﷺ dead on his throne for a period of time in order to remind him of his powerlessness.

Allah speaks to humans in the following verses:

**"I created you when you were nothing..."** (Maryam, 9)**.**

**"Every blessing that reaches you is from Allah. Then, when harm reaches you, you pray to Allah alone."** (Nahl, 53)**.**

'Nothingness' pertains to contemplating the meaning of these verses. Otherwise, one will be unable to protect oneself from heedlessly claiming to be a god as has been witnessed in the course of the lives of the Pharaohs and the Nimrods.

The great Sufi, Bayazid Bastami, *quddisa sirruh,* illustrated the state of 'nothingness' in the following prayer:

"O my Lord! Put aside my self between us so that my self gets lost in you and I become nothing! This is because, if I am with you, I am with all. Yet if I am wayward and lost in all, I cannot be with you. This would be the greatest shame for me to commit in witnessing your path."

The great master Muhammad Uftada began training Aziz Mahmud, who had taken his hand in initiation, by assigning him the duties of cleaning toilettes and selling liver in the market of Bursa. These duties were intended to immerse him in the feeling of 'nothingness' since he had been occupied with the highly respected post of being a judge. Eventually Aziz Mahmud reached to such a high level of perfection that he was able to give advice to the Ottoman sultans. For this reason, his master gave him the nickname "Hudayi" (i.e. holy man).

Abdulqadir al-Gilani, who is one of the great friends of Allah, went into seclusion in the ruins of Baghdad with the purpose of attaining to 'nothingness'.

The Sultan of the friends of Allah, Shah Naqshiband, *quddisa sirruh,* in the course of his search for 'nothingness', served sick animals for seven years. He served sick humans another seven years. Following this, he spent another seven years cleaning the streets.

This great friend of Allah, Shah Naqshiband has recounted his spiritual states and his struggle for the purification of his soul under his master Amir Kulal as follows:

"In the early days of my search, I met the great master Amir Qulal who was one of the friends of Allah. At that time, my ecstasy was high. He told me:

– Try to repair hearts. Serve the weak! Protect the poor and the broken-hearted people. They are people with no income from other people. Yet, they live in perfect tranquility, humility, and selflessness. Go and find them.

I followed the order of this great master. I had worked in the path he described for a long time.

Subsequently, this friend of Allah ordered me to serve animals by curing their diseases. He ordered me to bandage their wounds and clean them, without assistance and with sincerity.

I completed this service as well. I followed to the letter all his instructions. At that time, my ego entered such a state that if I came across a dog, I would stop and let it pass first. I would never take a step before it. This state continued unabated for seven years.

Then he requested that I serve his dogs with loyalty and with respect without asking for help from anyone else. He said:

– You will reach a great happiness while serving one of these dogs.

I received this command as a great gift. I did not spare any effort. I understood the meaning of his remark and waited for the good tiding. One day, I went to serve one of the dogs. I felt something in my soul. I stood before the dog; I could not help but cry. This dog gazed into me. It was as if it was Kitmir of the Seven Sleepers.

While I was crying, it lied on the ground on its back and raised its legs towards the sky. Then it began crying and making sad voices. I also opened my hands with

humility and said: "Amen!" It became quiet and returned to an upright position.

It was one of those days. I left home and went elsewhere. I came across a chameleon on my way whose color was changing according to the color of the light of the sun. It was in a spiritual ecstasy. A great state of ecstasy came upon me as well and I said to myself:

– Let me ask for the intercession of this animal on the Day of Judgment. This blessed animal must be at the level of intercession for others.

I stood before it with perfect etiquette and respect. I raised my hands. Then this blessed animal entered spiritual states that it was drawn into. Later, it lied on its back and turned its face to the sky. While it was in this position, I said: Amen!

Then, my master asked me to clean the streets of things that disturbed walkers. I ran after this task for seven years to the extent that my clothing was always dirty with dust from the stones and dust of the streets that I had to clean.

In sum, I did exactly whatever this great master, Amir Qulal, told me to do with full sincerity and loyalty. My soul became full of spiritual pleasures and great changes occurred in my spiritual states.[3]"

Another example is Imam Ghazali who chose to live in a state of 'nothingness' for some time in order to grow closer to the Lord, although in his studies he had already attained to the zenith of religious sciences.

3. al-Hadiqatu'l-Wardiyya, p. 545-547.

After bestowing triumph in the battle of Badr to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the companions, Allah reminded them of their 'nothingness' in the following verse:

**"On that day, you did not kill them, but Allah killed them. (O my Messenger!) When you threw, you did not throw but Allah threw."** (Anfal, 17)**.**

The power one has is according to the divine plan as borne out in ones destiny. For this reason, it is said: "No one has control and power except the Glorious Allah", *"La hawla wa la quwwata illa billah al-aliyy al-Azim"*.

This is because everything in existence has come to life only because of the generosity and blessing of Allah. So too, all the possessions of creatures have also come from their Creator. The divine universal will controls all events and all creatures. Even the origin of the will of creatures belongs to the Creator. Since human beings were sent to this world, they have been given a limited will and have been equipped with an understanding and ability to do both good and evil. The power to control this limited will has also been bestowed on them by their Creator.

Rumi has said:

"What is this claim about the superiority of one of us over the others? In the final analysis, are we not all at the gate of the same palace? Does not Allah say: "O people! You are all poor; I am the only One who is rich!"

Yunus Emre explained in an excellent manner the roots of this same truth:

*Knowledge is in knowing what knowledge is,*

*Knowledge is in knowing the self,*

*If you do not know yourself,*

*What is the purpose of studying?*

❁

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

"If you grow to show respect to Allah the way He deserves to be respected, you will come to know things through true knowledge; if you truly know Allah, mountains will move with your prayers."

Imam Ghazali, who represented the pinnacle of religious sciences in his time, narrated his own experience as follows:

"I was preoccupied with the religious and rational sciences. I had many students. I contemplated my condition. I saw that I was surrounded by many problems. I examined my intention in pursuing knowledge and realized that my intention was not pure, but mixed with desire for social status and fame. I came to conclude with certainty that I was about to be destroyed on a spiritual level. I was at the edge of an abyss. I said to myself:

– Act swiftly because not much time remains before your death. The knowledge you have accumulated is false unless it is put into practice. If you do not put an end to your unnecessary ties and clear your path of obstacles, how is your end going to be?

My spiritual state changed. I entered a state of astonishment, full of sorrow and I cried for six months in the valley of astonishment between this world and the next. My heart felt grief. I realized my weakness. I witnessed the total collapse of my will. I sought refuge in Allah and prayed to Him passionately as a person suffering from an illness with no cure. Eventually, Allah accepted my prayers and

woke my heart as is mentioned in the following verse from the Qur'an:

**"He is the one who accepts the prayer of the one who is in difficulty and lifts his problem..."** (Naml, 62)**.**

All desires in my heart for status and wealth were lifted. I turned my face away from them.

I kept myself busy with the remembrance of Allah, seclusion, loneliness, struggle against the ego, abstention, purifying the soul and perfecting my morality. I came to know with absolute certainty that those who reach to union with Allah by following the right path are the great Sufis. The best morality and conduct belongs to them. They took their internal and external characteristics from the light of the Prophet ﷺ. There is no light above the light of Prophethood."[4]

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "Whosoever expands his knowledge without a parallel increase in his piety will only have grown in his separation from Allah."

For this reason, Rumi states that the good words of the people without action are like borrowed good clothes.

❁

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

– When light enters a heart, it expands.

They asked:

– What is the sign of this?

He answered:

4. Ghazali, al-Munqid min al-Dalal.

– Abandoning the momentary world; longing for the eternal world of the Hereafter; getting ready for death before it arrives.

The companion Zayd ibn Haritha has said: "When I abandoned the mundane desires of the world, my days became thirsty and my nights became sleepless. I came to feel as if I was witnessing the Throne of my Lord. As if I was witnessing the people of Paradise, who joyfully visit each other, and the people of Hellfire, who hate each other."

❁

A number of important contemplative points from Imam Ghazali follow:

"Spending the gifts of Allah for a cause He likes is equal to thanking Him, while spending that which Allah gives you in a cause He dislikes is tantamount to disgracefulness."

"The real difficulties are with the sins and the disbelief. The other problems are not so substantial. They carry blessings in them which you may not recognize."

"When you want to say something, pause and think. If you are going to be held accountable by Allah if you do not say it, then say it; otherwise, keep silent."

"The intelligent person should say to his ego:

– My only capital is my life. The breath that leaves the body never returns back to it. The number of breaths is limited and continually decreasing. Therefore, can there be a bigger loss than not following the right path?"

"Protect your organs from unlawful acts (*haram*) as if you will die tomorrow."

"Stay awake! If you say, "I will repent later and do good deeds," think that death may come even earlier. You may regret your choice in the end. If you believe that repentance is easier tomorrow than today, you are wrong."

"If one's work in this world prevents him from working for the next world, he is in deep trouble. His will be a life of misery. He is as someone who accepts a clay pot in exchange for a golden goblet."

❁

Imam Ghazali explains in the following passage the spiritual impossibility of adequately overseeing our 'self' by oneself alone:

"The words *khalq* (creation) and *khulq* (morality) are derived from the same root. One is about the external world and the other is about the internal world.

*Khalq* is the form that can be known by the senses.

*Khulq* is hidden and cannot be known by looking at our external existence. The real identity of a person rests in his character, way of life, and his nature. Regardless of how much one hides himself in outer appearances, one day his inner identity will be disclosed."

As we need a mirror to see our outer appearance, so too we need a mirror for our heart: the help of a friend of Allah who will diagnose and cure our inner world, our character, and our inclinations.

If one wishes to know whether he is someone loved by Allah or not, he should closely evaluate his inner world: to the extent, he feels Allah in his heart and witnesses his power and kingdom with amazement he is close to Him.

For this reason, one should always be concerned with purifying his soul so that the manifestations of divine light, which will destroy the passions and the desires, can appear in the heart.

The Almighty Creator has said, **"Truly, the one who purifies his soul succeeds"** (Shams, 9)**.**

Likewise, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ also said: "The believer is a mirror of the believer." According to this hadith, the perfect humans serve as clear mirrors, with no stain on them, for our souls. In other words, seekers may observe the reality of their condition and their essence in the face of these individuals. This is not a material observation. The mirror of the heart goes well beyond the material dimension. In it one may explore the mysteries of the hidden inner worlds. This mirror is not a mirror of the outer world but rather a mirror of the inner world and there are no forms there save the reflections of Allah's lights. Therefore, those who spiritually seek out and reap rewards from this mirror carry a different kind of beauty and joy in their hearts. They grow to sacrifice themselves. They wish farewell to their ego and consequently reach to the blessing of Allah aiming to become completely absorbed in Him. For this reason, it is necessary to be under the guidance of a perfect master and to internalize his morality. Yunus Emre has said:

*"Shariah (religious law) and tariqah (mysticism) are paths for sincere seekers,*

*Yet the Truth and divine knowledge are beyond them."*

One can only reach to the secret mentioned in this couplet by Yunus Emre under the guidance of a perfect master.

The great master Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* saw too that it was necessary to be under the guidance of a friend of Allah (*wali*), who is an heir of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in order to overcome the obstacle of the ego and to attain to divine knowledge and to complete immersion in Truth. He has illustrated this in an example:

"How can a knife shape and sculpt its handle without the aid of another knife? Show your wounds to a true surgeon of the heart. You cannot cure them alone.

Consult a medical doctor concerning your physical health and mundane feelings and thoughts, but consult a perfect guide about the health of your soul and those feelings that may elevate you to eternity."

"Put two of your fingers over your eyes. Will you be able to see anything of this world? If you do not, it does not mean that this world does not exist. Not to see is a shame belonging to the two fingers of your ego.

First, remove your fingers from your eyes. Then you will be able to see what you wish. A human is as an eye. The rest is courage. What is called an eye is what sees the Beloved."

Prior to reading, the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet ﷺ straighten yourself. If a beautiful fragrance does not come to you in a rose garden, do not blame the garden, but blame your heart and your nose.

"Only those who have burned their egos and their mundane desires and have thus sacrificed themselves before the Qur'an can understand the meaning of the Qur'an."

❁

Rumi explained that the secret of reaching to the level of "self-effacement" (*fana*) is in complete submission:

"The water of the sea carries a dead body, which has completely submited to it, on its shoulders. How can a living person who harbors even the slightest hesitation be saved from the hands of the sea? If you purify yourself of egotistical desires by following the spiritual injunction to "die before death," the sea of secrets will carry you on its shoulders."

The objective of a human being while in this world should be to know his Creator and to worship Him. The secret of attaining to the depth of these things begins through experiencing even a fleeting fragrance of the garden of divine knowledge.

In order to progress to pure worship, one has to stay away from the temporary attractions and the passions of this world. For instance, such a warning drove Ibrahim Adham to enter the path of piety.

In the middle of the night, Ibrahim Adham was sleeping on his throne. Suddenly, he heard a noise coming from the roof. The Sultan woke-up as the noise grew louder. He stood and shouted:

– Who is there? What are you doing on the roof at this time of night?

A voice came:

– We are searching for our lost camel!

Ibrahim Adham shouted with anger:

– You idiots! How can you search for a camel on the roof?

This time the answer was highly significant and carried guidance in it:

– O Ibrahim Adham! You know that it is impossible to search for a camel on the roof, but do you know that it is equally impossible to search for Allah while sitting on a throne with silk clothes and a crown, and with a whip in your hand?

This incident caused the tides of Ibrahim Adham's soul to swing more frequently. It left him in an indecisive and astonished state. Yet, the Sultan could not abandon his former life entirely.

However, a second warning came to him during a hunting party that made him a genuine seeker in the path of Truth. The incident unfolded as follows:

Ibrahim Adham was running after a gazelle. He ran so far afield that he found himself completely separated from his soldiers. Nevertheless, he was so determined to hunt the gazelle that he did not give up and instead continued to follow it. When he cornered it, this beautiful and fragile animal spoke to him in a spiritual tongue:

– O Ibrahim! You have not been created for this! Did Allah create you from nothingness so that you could hunt me? Even if you hunt me, what are you going to gain? What are you going to gain other than ending a life?

When Ibrahim heard these words, he felt as if a fire had been dropped into his heart. He could not but fall from his horse. He began running towards the desert. After some

time, he looked around and could not see anyone except a shepherd. He went to him and said to him:

– Please, take all this jewelry, my royal clothes, my weapons, and my horse from me and give me the simple wool coat you are wearing. And, do not mention this to anyone.

While the shepherd was staring in astonishment, Ibrahim Adham disappeared to remove his attire and to change his clothes. The shepherd said to himself, "Our Sultan must have lost his mind." Yet, in truth Ibrahim Adham was not insane. To the contrary, he had just recollected his mind. He went to hunt gazelle, but in reality, Allah had hunted him as a gazelle.

❁

May Allah help all of us incorporate in our lives the advice of Rumi; taking lessons from the examples he has used as we work towards internalizing the condition of his heart. Amen!

Rumi, the great friend of Allah, has also said, "The people of divine knowledge are like guides; they help the ones who enter the path. Yet, those who have not entered the path do not appreciate the value of a guide, nor are they able to benefit from one.

Likewise, a doctor heals diseases. The ill people who voice their sufferings with their cries appreciate him. Yet, how can a dead person understand the value of a doctor?

This lifetime is passing while we spend our time thinking about hopes we have that are attached to future days as we occupy ourselves in the short term with worldly struggles, fights and trials.

Recollect your mind and realize that your life consists only of the day you are living. Reflect on what kind of whims will occupy you today.

This short but valuable life is quickly ending while you are busy filling your wallet with money and your stomach with food.

Death is taking us one moment after another away from this world. Do our minds apprehend the momentousness of this scary condition?

Death is standing on our path while we are busy being gentlemen wandering aimlessly around.

Death is so close to us. It is even closer than we can comprehend! Yet, I do not understand the mind of the heedless one."

In the verses below, *Sheikh* Ghalib illustrates that human beings are manifestations of divine names. Each is a small universe and simultaneously the essence of it. Moreover, humans have the ability to clean the mirror of their heart that attracts the secrets of this universe like a magnet.

*Look at yourself with joy for you are the essence of the universe,*

*You are the Adam, the pupil of the eye of the universe!*

In spite of being the essence of the universe, if a human being follows his desires he can fall to the lowest of the low levels. Rumi explains this as follows:

"O nightingale of the garden of the heart! If you act like an owl, you would commit a great mistake. O rose in the rose garden. If you act like a bush, you would harm yourself immensely."

O Lord! Grant us light in our eyes and hearts so that we can witness sparks of truth in the mirror of the heart and thus grow to be one of those honored with witnessing your beauty in the Hereafter.

Amen!

# You May Hurt Layla!

*There is no existence remaining in my body except you,*
*O my beloved!*
*I will therefore disappear in you,*
*The way vinegar disappears in a sea of honey.*

Rumi

Arising from grief borne of long separation from Layla, an illness suddenly arose in the body of Majnun. Thereupon the physician came to treat him and said to those in his attendance:

– There is no recourse but to bleed him.

Therefore, a skilled doctor was brought to treat him, bandaged his arm, and took out the lancet to perform the operation; but straightaway the passionate lover cried out:

– Take your fee and leave the bleeding! If I die, let my old body go to the grave!

Amazed, the doctor said:

– Why? Why are you afraid of this, when you have no fear of the lion in the jungle?

This is how Majnun responded:

"I do not fear the lancet. Everyone knows that my patience and perseverance exceed even that of a mountain formed of rock. I am a man who does not fear anything and who doesn't even own a hayloft in this world. I am a

vagabond and my body is not at ease without blows; I am a lover and wounds are as ointments to my love. That is why I do not hesitate to be injured. Nevertheless, my whole being is filled with Layla: the body of mine is as a shell filled with the qualities of that Pearl. I fear O doctor; if you draw blood from me you may suddenly inflict a wound with your lancet upon Layla. Indeed, the pure servants of Allah whose hearts are enlightened, know that there is no difference between Layla and me."

**THE MATHNAWI:**

*If there had not been love, where would this world have come from? How would the bread let you eat it, absolve itself in your body, and become you? Know that because of love the bread gave itself to you and became you by disappearing in you.*

*Love grants life even to the inanimate bread; it adds the life of the transient beings to your life and makes you eternal.*

*Know how miserable the one is whose heart is void of divine love and compassion; perhaps he is below animals. Even the dog of the Seven Sleepers searched for the people of love; it found them and attained a spiritual joy; and eventually it gained Paradise by loosing itself in those special servants.*

❁

The great poet Yunus Emre, who desired to share the fortune of Majnun's burning love, said:

*I am the Majnun of Layla,*

*I am the crazy lover of Rahman (the Most Merciful Allah),*

*To see the face of Layla,*

*I would become a Majnun!*

Fuzuli, another renowned Sufi poet, expressed his desire to reach even a higher level than the level of Majnun:

*I have a potential for love exceeding that of Majnun,*

*I am the true lover; Majnun carries just the name.*

Those who can see with the eye of the heart perceive all creatures as a manifestation of love. They observe that all creatures are the outcome of love. If there had not been eternal love, the universe would not have come to be. The Gnostics know that this world is an outcome of this eternal love and that is why it has been dedicated to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

In the special class of hadith known as al-Hadith al-Qudsi, we find the following: "I was a hidden treasure. I yearned to be known. Thus, I created the universe so that I could be known."

We understand from this statement that the entire universe including all of its creatures was brought into existence through divine love. Allah created all of them as an evidence of His art and power. Perceived in this way, a human being, who is a wonderful creation of Divinity, is a perfect manifestation of divine love.

The following verse of Yunus Emre conveys deep meanings:

*For us, love is the leader and heart is the community,*

*The face of the Beloved is the Qiblah; the prayer is ceaseless.*

This is because the bodies of the lovers of Allah are bursting with the love of Allah. For instance, the blood of Hallaj Mansur wrote 'Allah, Allah' on the ground when he was martyred. As in the case of Hallaj Mansur, Fuzuli too had reached the level of self-effacement (*fana*). This is clear from the way he chose to express himself below in the voice of Majnun:

*You are the One who is manifest in me,*

*I no longer exist, what exists is you.*

*If I am I, then who are you, O Beloved?*

*If I am you, then who is my crying self?*

Yunus Emre articulated this sophisticated puzzle as follows:

*I am dressed up with bones and meat,*

*And appeared with the name Yunus!*

Truly, the lovers of Allah know that there is no distance separating the true lovers from their Beloved. Mystically, the bodies of the lovers of Allah are but transient since their figurative existence disappears in the fire and burning of their hearts. The relationship between Prophet Yaqub ﷺ and his son Yusuf ﷺ serves as an example of this. The great Prophet Yaqub ﷺ was inclined strongly towards Yusuf ﷺ as he observed many of his own qualities in him. As a result of the love between them, they became so deeply bonded that when the shirt of Yusuf ﷺ began its journey

from Egypt, the Prophet Yaqub ﷺ perceived its fragrance in the land of Canaan in Palestine. However, no one else had his awareness. They were suspicious of senility, since he was saying: "I am perceiving the fragrance of Yusuf".

The shirt of Yusuf ﷺ was a trust in the hands of his brother who was given the responsibility of taking it to his father. Although the shirt was in the hands of his brother, its value far exceeded what was fitting for him. This could be likened to a very special person being captured by a slave trader. Although the person has fallen into the hands of the trader, due to her value she far exceeds what is intended for his likes and instead must be put in the hands of one more in keeping with the rank of the captive.

❁

The Almighty Allah preserved oneness exclusively for Himself and created everything else in pairs. This aspect of creation, which only recently has been discovered by modern science, was revealed to us in many verses of the Qur'an fourteen centuries ago. Our world, which is furnished in an excellent aesthetic sense, even more beautifully than a wedding room, follows a special and amazing law of marriage to which everything is subjected including atoms, biological cells, plants, animals, humans, and even the electrons and neutrons inside an atom.

In the Surah Yasin, it is said:

**"Glory be to Him who created all the pairs, of that which the earth grows, and of themselves, and of that which they know not!"** (Yasin, 36)

However, the law of marriage found its highest expression in the lives of humans.

Allah the Most High explains that in the institution of marriage there are many latent lessons to learn:

**"And of His signs is this: He created for you help mates from yourselves that ye might find rest in them, and He ordained between you love and mercy. Lo! herein indeed are portents for folk who reflect."** (Rum, 21)

The union of two strangers in marriage in accordance with the divine plan, as well as being in accordance with the growth of love and compassion between them, is a manifestation of divine power, which deserves serious contemplation. In the entirety of creation, the attraction of animate and inanimate forms respectively towards each other is a manifestation of unity. In other words, unity is an outcome of attraction and affinity. There exists in the nature of the world an inclination to return to unity.

Creation reaches its zenith in human beings. The fire of love is proportionate to the perfection of its object. Couples gain a taste for divine mercy on the physical and spiritual levels. This puts them on a journey towards Allah through the means of divine attraction and love. In this way, the wisdom behind creation prevails on their minds completely.

Layla came to Majnun after many years. Majnun did not show interest in her. Layla said:

– Are not you the one who lived in the desert for me?

Majnun replied:

– The Layla, who is but a shadow, has melted and has been cleared away.

Layla, who was the sole object of Majnun's life, served as but a window to never-ending divine love. As Majnun

came to himself in the world of divine love, the secret of which he had been searching for, Layla's role was ultimately fulfilled.

In the stories of the *Mathnawi* of Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* Layla is a symbol of the love that turns to divine love and unifies the lover with Allah.

In other words, Layla is the horizon of divine love that opens hearts to the vastness of selflessness and effaces the physical will.

From this perspective, the adventure of love that begins with Layla reaches its fruition in the Mawla, Allah.

In the final analysis, Layla is an ordinary human being. She has made her lover into a legend such that even his original name, which was Qays, has been changed to Majnun, which means crazy.

But what happens to the lover if the beloved is not Layla but the one who was referred to by Allah as my 'beloved.' (i.e. the Prophet ﷺ?

Let us explain this issue more clearly with a few examples. The first one is from the life of Rumi:

❁

Ghurju Khatun was a female disciple of Rumi. Her husband was a general. One day, he was assigned to work in Kayseri, a city in Anatolia. Ghurju Khatun wanted to carry a picture of her master, Rumi, with her as they prepared to leave Konya. She asked the famous painter and decorator of the Saljuqi palace to secretly make a picture of Rumi and bring it to her. The painter went to Rumi and asked for his permission. Rumi smiled at the painter and granted him permission:

– Do as you have been requested, the way you like.

The painter began drawing. Yet as he completed the painting, he realized that the person in front of him, turned into another form that bore no resemblance to his painting. So he drew him again and again. This continued twenty times. In the end, the painter realized his powerlessness and gave up. He kissed the hands of Rumi. His art was lost in his drawing[5].

This event caused an awakening in the painter, throwing him into deep thought, amazement, fear, and awe. The following words came forth from the tongue of this astonished painter:

– In this religion, if a saint can engender this, what would its Prophet ﷺ be like?

❁

Imam Malik, may Allah be pleased with him, lived in the ecstasy of union with Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. He did not mount an animal in the city of Medina. He did not use the toilet. He always spoke with a low voice while in the mosque of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. When the Caliph of the time spoke loudly in the Mosque of the Prophet ﷺ he reminded him as follows:

– O Caliph! Keep your voice low in this place. This warning came from Allah to a group of people more virtuous than you.

Then he read the following verse from the Qur'an:

**"O ye who believe! Lift not up your voices above the voice of the Prophet, nor shout when speaking to him as ye**

5. These pictures still exist in the Mawlana Museum in Konya.

**shout at one another, lest your works be rendered vain while ye perceive not"** (Hujurat, 2)**.**

❁

Likewise, Imam Malik forgave the governor of Medina who had mistreated him by saying: "On the Day of Judgment, I would feel ashamed to be at court with a grandson of the Prophet ﷺ."

The great teacher As'ad Arbili articulated his love for Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in a beautiful manner too:

*With all this fire, it is impossible to wash the corpse of the martyr of love,*

*The body is fire; the shroud is fire; even the sweet water is fire!*

The Azari poet, Fuzuli, explained love as follows in his famous "Ode of Water":

*Do not shed tears, O my eye, onto the flames of my heart,*

*For, water cannot extinguish such a glowing fire.*

Ottoman Sultan Ahmad Khan I aimed to gain spiritual blessing by making a small model of the Prophet's sandal and putting it on his turban. He wrote:

*I wish I could always carry on my head as a crown,*

*The pure foot of the king of the prophets.*

The emperor of the world in his time, Yavuz Sultan Selim Khan, believed that the value of a friend of Allah, who could lead one to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was above all else and expressed this feeling in a couplet:

*Becoming the king of this world is but a useless struggle,*

*Being the slave of a saint is superior to all else.*

This is an expression of the importance of spiritually growing closer to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and to his lovers.

Likewise, Rumi said, "Love moves the muddy waters to clarity. True love gives life to dead hearts; it even makes the sultans slaves."

Sayyid Ahmad Yasawi, who dug a grave for himself when he reached the age of sixty-three and began living in it, said: "Beyond this age, it would not be appropriate for me to reside above the ground." Since the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had passed away at the age of sixty-three, the hero of love, who was completely united with his beloved, chose to leave this world at the same age by continuing to pass his life in a grave. Because of his legendary love for Prophet Muhammad ﷺ the land Ahmad Yasawi lived in is called Blessed Turkistan.

In a similar manner, when Uways al-Qarani learned that one of the teeth of the Prophet ﷺ had been broken in the battle of Uhud, all his teeth felt alien to him. As he did not know which one had been broken, he took out all of them in order to maintain his unity with the beloved.

The husband, father and brother of a woman from a tribe called the Sons of Dinar became martyrs in the battle of Uhud. When she was informed that all three had died, she requested:

– Take me to the Prophet Muhammad. I want to see him.

When she was able to see the Prophet ﷺ she experienced contentment and said:

– O Messenger of Allah! As long as you are alive, all other afflictions are nothing for me.

When Hansa Khatun, who came to Islam after a difficult life, was told that each of her four sons had been killed and had become martyrs in the battle of Qadisiye, she expressed her reaction in the following words:

– Let my four sons be sacrificed for the victory of Islam.

She thanked Allah for the honor of being the mother of four martyrs.

Similarly, Bezm-i Alem Sultan wrote:

*Muhammad originated from love (muhabbah),*

*What would emerge from love without Muhammad?*

It is through love for Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that our souls are nourished.

When my late teacher, Yaman Dede, used to teach the *Mathnawi* in class, his eyes shed tears that became as a pool of pearls. He expressed his feelings at those moments as follows:

*My interior became full of blood, O Messenger of Allah, out of love for you;*

*O the Messenger of Allah, how have I endured this separation?*

*The separation cries; the reunion cries out of the joy of the return to the Origin;*

*With your beauty, comfort me, O Messenger of Allah, for I am burned.*

When he read this poem, his face radiated as a full moon on a dark night.

❁

Throughout the course of history, prophets and saints have served as torches of guidance in the perfection of our spiritual lives. This service has, in function always carried the stream of faith to its zenith. Individuals may reach to this perfection through spiritual fellowship and identification with the friends of Allah, and may ultimately grow to receive a diploma written by the pen of eternity.

Through constructing a life based on mirroring the life and actions of the Prophet ﷺ one is able to establish a fellowship with the Messenger of Allah. This is done in practice through following in detail the life and example of a friend of Allah who thus functions as a bridge to the inner world leading one to the abode of the Prophet ﷺ. The student of this path unites with each of his mentors and receives a share from their hearts and inner worlds.

Abu Bakr was a person who rose to an exalted state of unity with the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. For this reason, he was blessed with knowledge concerning the Prophet ﷺ more than anyone else. He lived in this fire of love with a burnt fragrance emanating from his breast. Imam Bukhari explained: "Abu Bakr as-Siddiq complained that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ remained before his eyes on the spiritual level even when he was in the bathroom. In other words, the great believer Abu Bakr explained to the Prophet ﷺ that even at those moments when he was cleaning himself, he maintained a spiritual state of unity with him."

What Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said on his death bed is consistent with these accounts. The following hadith explains beautifully the mutual flow of love between their two hearts.

– Let all the doors be closed. Only Abu Bakr's will remain open.

❁

One day Khaja Ubaidullah Ahrar suddenly felt cold. He began shaking. They lit a fire to warm him up. At that moment, one of his disciples, who had accidentally fallen in a ditch of cold water shortly before his arrival, entered the room shaking from the cold. They took him aside, dried his clothes and warmed him up. When the disciple felt warm, Ubaidullah Ahrar no longer felt cold.

Bayazid-i Bastami became so sensitive and refined through divine love that he loved all creatures for the sake of the Creator and sympathized with their sorrows in a way that always made him gloomy.

One day, some people had beaten a donkey in front of him until it was bleeding. At that moment, he began to bleed from his calves.

When a nightingale chants, you do not stop to discern voices coming from the mountain before you. The greater our love, the closer we are brought to its object.

They told the Caliph Ali that someone loved him very much. In response, the great Caliph said:

– Yes, he loves me as much as I love him.

In other words, this condition of spiritual unity may be compared to the fluid levels in two separate but conjoined sections of a compound container. The flow of fluid

between the compartments is a product of a bond of spiritual love (i.e *rabita*).

This spiritual bond in *tasawwuf* is borne of practicing spiritual love in a formally fresh and living way. This love may be appropriately directed towards Allah, His Messenger and His spiritually righteous slaves. Imam Ghazali has exemplified this bond through the recitation of the *"Tahiyyat"* in the five daily prayers. After elucidating the importance of tranquility of heart during our five daily prayers, he says: "During the first and last time one sits down, while saying 'O the Prophet! May peace be upon you! (*As-salam alayka ayyuha an-Nabiy!*)', one should imagine the Prophet between the eyes of his heart".

The prayer *"Tahiyyat"* is a magnificent expression of love. A believer who is performing *salat* may spiritually reap great rewards from this prayer. The first sentence in this prayer states the following:

*"Glory be to Allah along with prayers and praises."* This is how the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ expressed his salutation to Allah on the night of his Ascension into the heavens (i.e. the *Miraj)*. They are the words Allah revealed to his heart after commanding him to: *"Speak with Me, O My Messenger!"*

The second sentence is as follows:

*"O Prophet! May the peace, the mercy and the blessing of Allah be upon you!"*

This statement is a gift of enormous spiritual magnitude and is a special blessing from the Creator to his Messenger.

The third sentence states the following:

*"Peace be upon us and upon all the righteous."*

This is how the Prophet ﷺ responded to the greeting his Lord had extended to him. Here we see, as evidence of his great compassion and mercy, how the Messenger has magnanimously mentioned in his prayer all the righteous believers in his community.

The archangel Jibril عليه السلام who witnessed this dialogue between Allah and His Messenger ﷺ on the night of the Ascension offered testimony by saying:

*"I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and His Messenger."*

Archangel Jibril's عليه السلام additional act of bearing witness underscores the importance of this testimony of faith in the unity of Allah and also confirms the necessity of including in the formal greeting for the Prophet ﷺ the blessing *sallallahu alaihi wa sallam.*

Briefly put, a prayer that includes words articulated by Allah, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and archangel Jibril is a blessing of vast proportion and nothing less than a divine gift for the community of Muhammad. When pronouncing this prayer we receive benefit from it to the degree of our spiritual perfection. Whenever uttering it the servant should refrain from heedlessness and consciously pronounce it as if in the presence of the Creator. In doing so, he will be spiritually striving to perform his prayer fully in accordance with the hadith: "The *salat* (i.e. the five daily prayers) is the Ascension of the believer to the presence of Allah."

It should be noted that to maintain our awareness that we are in the presence of Allah from the beginning of the *salat* to the end is an achievement of vast proportion

difficult even for the great saints. Nevertheless, we need to bear in mind that the greater our awareness and concentration of our heart during the *salat*, the greater the possibility that the prayer will be accepted by Allah and the reward for it will be proportionally increased. Consequently, those who perform the *salat* should strive to maintain their concentration and awareness. Otherwise, the warning from Allah is terrifying: **"Ah, woe unto worshippers who are heedless of their prayer"** (Ma'un, 4-5)**.**

The true *salat* is the one performed with concentration of heart. The verse below states this fact: **"Successful indeed are the believers who are humble in their prayers"** (Muminun 1-2). This state of concentration and awareness embraces all aspects of a believer's life. For this reason, Rumi interpreted the mystic meaning of the verse, **"They are constant at their prayer"** (Maarij, 23), as follows: "It means that the state of the heart after the *salat* should be the same as it is during the *salat*."

Attaining to this level is possible only through a sincere and deep connection between one's heart and the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. This bond (i.e. *rabita*) as it expands, opens into spiritual unity with him. A person is on the path of unity with the Prophet ﷺ to the extent that he feels continually in his presence and purifies his heart of mundane affairs. This is the path to spiritual integrity, strength, and maturity.

None of the companions could know his significance completely. No one could fully encompass the scope of his creation. Even archangel Jibril said at the *Sidra al-Muntaha* (i.e. the last border) during his Ascension:

– You continue. I may not go beyond this border.

Each companion experienced the Prophet ﷺ to the extent of his or her spiritual evolution. Each of their vantage points was a function of their level of understanding.

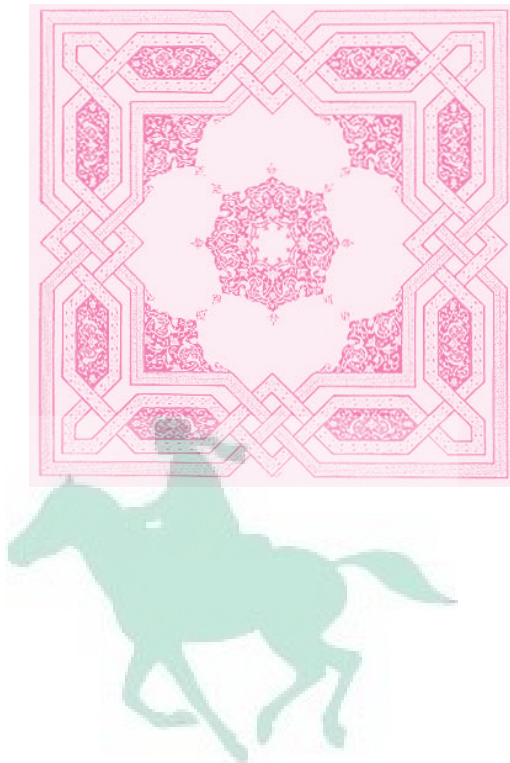
Aisha, may Allah be pleased with her, said: "The face of the Prophet shined and radiated so much light that it was brighter than a full moon. With the help of his light, I used to put a thread in the eye of a needle."

Rumi said: "The two worlds have been created for one heart (i.e. the heart of the Prophet). 'If you (O Muhammad!) had not existed, if you (O Muhammad!) had not existed, I would not have created the universe!' is the expression (i.e. *Hadith Qudsi*) you should contemplate about."

O Lord! Have us join in the ranks of your true lovers whose hearts are full of divine wisdom and bring us together with your loyal slaves in both worlds.

Amen!

# The Guardian of Layla's Abode



*Stay silent if you are not Majnun,*
*For the one who has not attained that love,*
*Layla is just a form.*

Rumi

Majnun, melting with fondness before a drooling dog, was caressing the animal as he kissed its eyes. A passer-by was unable to bear this sight and cried out:

– O half-baked Majnun, what is the insanity that you are displaying? A dog's muzzle is ever eating filth; have you stopped to consider this before kissing it?

Majnun responded:

– What do you understand of what I am doing since as a whole you are nothing more than a form, figure and body! Come within to the world of spirit, and view the dog through my eyes. Are you even remotely familiar with the virtues of this dog? In this dog there is a divine mystery that you can't comprehend. Allah has hidden in its heart the treasure of love and loyalty that it feels towards its master. Among so many villages it has chosen to dwell in the village of Layla. This dog is the guardian of the abode of Layla. Look at its high aspiration and observe its heart, its soul and its knowledge acquired directly from Allah. It is the dog of the blessed countenance, the *Kitmir* of my cave; nay, it

is the sharer of my happiness and woe. The dog that guards her abode, oh, it is impossible to entertain the thought that I could trade a single hair of it even for lions. For me, the soil it steps on is sacred. There is no possibility of speaking further. Silence and farewell!

**THE MATHNAWI:**

*If you pass beyond form, O friends, it is Paradise and rose-garden within rose-garden. When you have broken and burned your own form, which is full of groundless fear, apprehension and arrogance, or if you break yourself from the worship of your own soul which is the mother of all idols, you will have learned how to destroy the idols in yourself. After that, you will find the power to break every form: like Khaydar[6] (Ali), you will uproot the gate of Khaybar; or like Prophet Ibrahim* عليه السلام *you will be able to turn a vicious fire into a rose garden.*

There is another story about Layla from the *Mathnawi*. It is the story of the Caliph who saw Layla.

The Caliph said to Layla:

– Are you she by whom Majnun was distracted and led astray? You are not superior to other fair ones.

She replied:

– Be silent, since you are not Majnun.

For those who rely on appearance, Layla was not remarkably different from other women. The reason why Qays became Majnun (i.e. crazy), with her love is because he saw her inner beauty. It was for this reason that the

6. Khaydar, which means lion or hero, is a nickname used for the fourth Rightly Guided Caliph Ali, may Allah be pleased with him. He was given this title for his heroic actions.

Caliph could not comprehend the mystery of Majnun's love, because he could not look at Layla through the eyes of Majnun. To witness this love we must be asleep to the outer appearance of Layla and instead we must be immersed in the fire burning within her. For the one asleep to the inner, the soul has neither joy nor grace nor glory, and no way of journeying to Heaven.

Some people who were not familiar with this truth, out of pity for Majnun, said to him:

– O Majnun, leave Layla, for there are other women more beautiful than her.

Majnun answered:

– Our forms, bodies, and appearances are like urns. The beauty is as the divine drink within the urn. Know that Allah, the most Exalted, offers me this drink from Layla's urn. You see only the appearance of Layla, but are unaware of what is inside! Because the divine drink, which is inside, is not visible to those who have no share in spiritual knowledge. The presence of the loyalty of a woman who is invisible to strangers and has no eyes for them resembles her internal beauty.

It was in this sense that Sheikh Sadi Shirazi, *quddisa sirruh,* said: "One should witness the beauty of Layla through the window in the heart of Majnun."

Majnun means crazy, yet in reality, he is an intelligent person who has effaced his ego in divine love. There are many people, who limit intelligence only to rationality, but using this faculty alone may even fail to distinguish between what is right and wrong. Their earning is misery in this world and the next. For this reason, Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* said:

*Do not call the intelligence of love crazy! Do not call he who is absorbed in his soul a liar. Do not call an endless ocean a cup. He knows his name better.*

The lines below are by Yunus Emre. They beautifully illustrate the madness of divine love because they are uttered at its burning zenith.

*I wander around in flames,*
*Love completely covered me with blood,*
*I am neither sane nor insane,*
*Come and see how love treats me.*
*I, sometimes, blow like the winds,*
*Sometimes, I, raise dust like the roads,*
*I sometimes flow like the floods,*
*Come and see how love treats me.*

❁

One should keep in mind that the stories in the *Mathnawi* are metaphorical expressions. Layla is both the symbol and the horizon of divine love.

If you want to see Layla, you should be a faithful lover. Otherwise, what you will see is but the form. For those who are not true lovers, Layla is just a form.

Rumi has explained this as follows:

*The appearance of every blessing and burden varies among people; it is a Paradise for some and a Hellfire for others.*

*Whether it is a human being, animal, plant or an inanimate being, in every thing there is a food and a poison. But not every one can see.*

*The urn is there. It is visible. But the elixir is inside and only those who taste it know it.*

*The appearance of Yusuf was also like a cup. His father was getting pleasure as he was drinking from it. Yet his brothers were drinking poison from the same cup and it was increasing the measure of their anger and the scope of their grudge.*

*Zulaiha also drank yet a different kind of elixir from the cup that was Yusuf, and she became drunk with a mundane love.*

*The wine of love within the urn of form is from the Unseen world. The urn, however, is from this world. Although the jug is of creation, what is inside is hidden and is accessible only to those who deserve it.*

❁

When Allah took Prophet Ibrahim ﷺ as an intimate friend for Himself, the angels said:

– O Lord! How can Ibrahim ﷺ be your friend? He has an ego, material wealth and children. His heart is inclined towards these things…

Consequently, Ibrahim was put through arduous trials. When he was about to be thrown into the fire with a catapult, the angels became nervous. Some of them asked for permission from Allah to go to his assistance. After gaining His approval, when they approached him and asked whether he needed assistance, Ibrahim ﷺ replied:

– Do not enter between two friends!

Later, Archangel Jibril ﷺ came and remarked:

– Can I be of any assistance?

Ibrahim ﷺ responded:

– I have no need of you. He alone is enough for me. He is the best of caretakers.

Eventually Ibrahim ﷺ because of his complete reliance on his Creator, was saved by a direct order from Allah to the fire: **"O fire! Be coolness and peace for Ibrahim"** (Anbiya, 69)**.** This is but one example of why Ibrahim ﷺ was also called *Khalilullah* or the intimate friend of Allah.

With this order, the place where Ibrahim ﷺ fell became as a rose-garden and a spring with sweet water began to flow.

Again, on another occasion, when Ibrahim ﷺ, was taking his son Ismail ﷺ to sacrifice him, the angels became nervous and said to their Lord:

– A prophet is taking another prophet to sacrifice him.

Ismail ﷺ however, said to his father:

– Father! Do what Allah has ordered you to do. Allah willing, you will see that I will remain patient.

While they were swimming in an ocean of submission to the divine, the Archangel Jibril ﷺ intervened at the last moment and prevented the knife from cutting Ismail ﷺ. He brought a sheep to take his place as a sacrifice.

In another trial, Allah granted Ibrahim ﷺ a huge flock of sheep. The Archangel Jibril ﷺ came to him and asked:

– Whose flock is this? Can you sell me one of them?

Ibrahim ﷺ answered:

– The flock belongs to my Lord. It has been given to me as a trust. If you mention His name, you can take one third of it; but if you mention His name three times, you can take all of it.

The Archangel Jibril ﷺ said:

– Glorified and beyond all shortcomings is our Lord, the Lord of all angels and of all souls.

Ibrahim عليه السلام responded:

– Take the entire flock with you and go.

The Archangel Jibril عليه السلام said in return:

– I am not a man; I am an angel. So I cannot take them.

Ibrahim عليه السلام said:

– If you are an angel, I am the *Khalil* (i.e. the intimate friend of Allah) so I cannot take back what I have given for His sake.

Ibrahim عليه السلام sold the entire flock and spent the earnings in the path of Allah as charity.

Ibrahim عليه السلام was put through difficult trials in which he was tested with his life, his property, and his children. In each case, he maintained his loyalty and his submission to his Lord. Thus, he rose to the zenith of service to Allah. He abandoned form and climbed to the level of being *Khalilullah*, the intimate friend of Allah.

❁

There was a huge fire in Baghdad and two sons of a scholar were caught in it. No one could do anything but cry. The great Sufi Nuri witnessed the event as he was passing by and entered the fire as if he was entering a rose-garden. He took the children out of the fire with the permission of Allah while bystanders were watching.

The father of the children was so happy that he put a bag of gold in front of the great Sufi Nuri. Upon seeing this, he became openly displeased and said:

– If I did what I did for money, I would never have been able to take your sons out of the fire.

Entering fire is only possible by becoming spiritually one with the consciousness of Ibrahim ﷺ and by choosing to emulate him. The reason why the fire did not burn Ibrahim ﷺ but was instead a blessing for him was because it was a gift to him out of his boundless love for Allah and out of his submission to his divine Creator.

Inspired by this gift given to the great Prophet Ibrahim ﷺ Junayd al-Baghdadi remarked: "If there had been a sea of fire between me and my Lord, because of my love and my longing for Him, I would have thrown myself into it in order to reach Him."

At the same time, we must exercise great caution. Attempting to emulate Ibrahim ﷺ without an awareness of our spiritual station and our limits would be utter foolishness and cause great loss.

Rumi has explained this as follows: "In the path of Allah it is possible for you to enter fire. Yet before doing so you must search in your soul for the qualities of Ibrahim ﷺ and enter into union with them, for the fire does not recognize you but rather only recognizes the qualities of Ibrahim ﷺ and frees them alone from being burned."

❁

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* says moreover:

*The Qur'an contains the states and qualities of the prophets. If you read the Qur'an with concentration you may consider yourself spending time with the prophets. After reading the stories of*

*the prophets, the cage of the body becomes small for the bird of the soul.*

*We freed ourselves from the cage of the body only through a way. There is no way to obtain freedom from that cage except through the path of Tawhid, or faith in the unity of Allah.*

The purpose in transcending the form is illuminated by the hadith: *"Die before you actually die."*

Those who practice this hadith and die before physical death gain a new life in the spring of ultimate reality and abandon their forms. They attain a new life in the truth of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. As it is stated in the Qur'an: **"We sent thee not save as a mercy for the peoples"** (Anbiya, 107)**.**

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is the reason metaphysically for the creation of the world. We should aim to benefit from this manifestation of divine mercy as we struggle to efface ourselves in it.

For this reason, Imam Malik did not ride in Medina where the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had walked barefoot. He did not even put on his shoes. When someone came to ask about a hadith, he used to make ablution (*wudu*), put on his turban, use nice perfumes, and sit on a high place. Only then would he answer the question about the hadith. By performing these acts, he spiritually prepared himself for the presence of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. He also used to strictly follow all rules pertaining to good manners as he was narrating any hadith of the Prophet ﷺ

During Ottoman times, a caravan was sent yearly from Istanbul to Mecca and Medina with valuable gifts and money for the inhabitants of the holy lands and to provide for the needs of the Holy Sanctuaries. This caravan was

called "*Surre Alayi*". When it approached Medina, the *Surre Alayi* used to stop at the outskirts of the city in order to allow everyone to prepare spiritually before entering the city and to ask for permission from the Prophet ﷺ for visitation. The caravan moved when a spiritual sign of acceptance had been received and only then would the people in the caravan perform their visits. When they returned home, they would carry with them the soil of Medina both as a blessing and for healing.

Similarly, when Ottoman generals assigned to protect Medina wanted to visit the Prophet ﷺ they used to abandon their carts at a remote place so as to visit on foot with the best of manners.

When the Ottoman Sultan Abdulaziz was in his deathbed, he was told that there was a petition from the residents of Medina. He requested his assistants:

– Help me stand up! I should listen to it while standing. I cannot listen to the letter of the neighbors of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ while lying down.

This historical event substantiates the love and respect the Ottoman Sultans had for the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and too for the city of Medina and its residents.

The mother of Sultan Abdul Majid, Bazm-i Alem Valide Sultan, sponsored the transportation by camel of sweet water from Damascus to Mecca and Medina to be freely distributed to pilgrims. This service that she performed to the pilgrims at the *Haramayn* or the two sacred mosques, was done with the hope of gaining spiritual blessing.

The poet Nabi went on hajj with the Ottoman public officials in 1678. Nabi became sleepless as the caravan approached Medina. One day he observed a general

stretching his leg in the direction of Medina. The general was unaware of what he had done. The soul of the poet was wounded by this act and he was inspired to write his celebrated poem about the Prophet ﷺ. Poems about the Prophet in Ottoman literature constitute a special genre known as "*na't*," which is a continuation in the tradition of earlier Arabic poetry. As the caravan approached Medina at the time of the morning prayer, the poet Nabi heard his *na't* being recited from the minarets of the Mosque of the Prophet ﷺ:

*Refrain from neglecting the etiquette, for this is the town of the beloved of Allah;*

*It is forever in Allah's gaze; it is the abode of the chosen and praised Prophet.*

*Only when you follow the best etiquette, O Nabi, enter this Holy Sanctuary;*

*Sublime creatures circle round it; it is a land prophets come to visit and kiss.*

Hearing the recitation of his poem praising the Prophet ﷺ which he had just privately composed, from the minarets of the Holy Mosque, Nabi rushed to the *muadhdhin*, the one who had performed the call to prayer, and asked:

– How did you learn this poem?

The *muadhdhin* replied:

– I saw the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in my dream. He told me about you and your poem and asked me to recite it from the minaret. He told me, "a poet called Nabi from my *ummah* will come." I simply followed his order.

Nabi began to cry uncontrollably. While he was crying, he said the following:

– The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said I was from his *ummah*. The sun of the two worlds has accepted me as one of his followers.

❁

There is a genre in Islamic poetry known as *Mawlid*, which consists of poetry pertaining to the birth and the life of the Prophet ﷺ. In a *Mawlid* composed by Suleyman Celebi we find the following:

*Allah is the one who created Adam;*

*He ornamented the world with Adam.*

This couplet stresses the relationship between the human being and the world and illuminates the purpose of creation. The same poet described the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as follows:

"*A light for which the sun is as a moth* (night butterfly)."

It illustrates that the sun, which enlightens the entire world, was in love with the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and revolving around him like a moth revolves around a light at night. This is an excellent example of how even inanimate forms have love for the Prophet ﷺ.

Believers with refined and pure souls have considered it as the greatest of blessings to pursue oneness with the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. In this spiritual process of self-sacrifice, they have striven to efface themselves in his light. Drawn by the spiritual pleasure of proximity to the Prophet ﷺ their path has been likened to that of a moth revolving around a night light.

❁

An example, which portrays a similar love for Prophet Muhammad ﷺ may be seen in a story about one of his uncles named Ja'far Tayyar.

Ja'far, may Allah be pleased with him, was among those who returned to Medina from Abyssinia after having immigrated there due to mounting pressures from Arab polytheists in Mecca on the early Muslim community. When they arrived in Medina, they learned that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had gone to Khaybar and instead of waiting for his return they decided to continue on their journey and join him there. When he saw Ja'far, the Prophet ﷺ said to him:

– You resemble me so much physically and spiritually.

This praise made Ja'far excited. He entered a state of ecstasy. He began dancing like an innocent small child as if he had lost himself.

The Prophet ﷺ stood up and said:

– Should I be happy for the arrival of Ja'far or for having conquered Khaybar?

In the battle of Mûta, as specified by the Prophet ﷺ Ja'far was the second in command of the army after Zayd. When Zayd fell in battle as a martyr, Ja'far took the flag of the army in his hands. In the course of the struggle, he lost both hands to the strikes of swords that reached him. He then tried to hold the flag with his half-mutilated arms on his chest. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was observing this incident from Medina through the eye of his heart. He was in tears as he was describing to his companions what was happening on the battlefield. Finally, he told them that Ja'far had been martyred. He commented:

– Allah granted two wings to Ja'far in Paradise as reward for having sacrificed both of his arms in the path of Allah.

From then on, he greeted the young sons of Ja'far, while patting them on their heads, as "the sons of the one with two wings."

Ja'far, may Allah be pleased with him, was drunk with the love of the Prophet ﷺ. He thus attained both the praise of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as well as great gifts from Allah in Paradise. He was successful in attaining advanced spiritual depth before reaching the rank of a martyr on the path which brought him the blessing of Allah.

❁

One gains the feeling when reading the following lines by Rumi that he is describing the love of Ja'far, may Allah be pleased with him.

*The eyes of the prophets and the saints are wide like seas. Because of this wide openness, this world and the world to come are to them as but a hair.*

*Even if thousands of skies were to enter their eyes, they would remain as but a fountain compared to the ocean.*

*The eye, after having entirely given up this world of the senses, sees the unseen world and in this success is blessed with divine emanations and favors.*

*If tears were to come from such eyes, the Archangel Jibril would try to catch a drop.*

*He would, with the permission of that kind prophet or saint, place that tear on his wing.*

Sheikh Attar has also remarked in his book, *Maqâlât-i Arwah*, "One day Junayd Baghdadi, *quddisa sirruh,* witnessed angels descending from the heavens while trying to catch something on the earth. He asked them:

– What is it that you are trying to catch?

The angles replied:

– A friend of Allah has sighed here with sorrow and has cried. The drops of his tears have fallen on the ground and we are trying to gain a share of it so that we can also reap the blessing of Allah."

During the battle of Tabuk, seven poor companions came to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and asked for riding animals so as to join the battle. When they learned that no camels remained to be given to them, they returned to their homes in tears. These tears were accepted and were rewarded by Allah, which is stated in the following verse of the Qur'an: **"...when they came to thee (asking) that thou shouldst mount them, thou didst tell: I cannot find whereon to mount you. They turned back with eyes flowing with tears, for sorrow that they could not find the means to spend"** (Tawba, 92)**.**

After the arrival of this revelation, the great companions, Umar, Uthman and Abbas, may Allah be pleased with them all, donated to the poor companions camels and food and took them along on the journey.

Let us not forget that the tears of those companions, who in their love for the Prophet ﷺ cried at the thought of being separated from him during his journey, were looked upon with great admiration by the angels who vied to gain a share of it. Imagine the scope of the loss represented by the opposite of this state of consciousness!

It has been revealed in a Qur'anic verse that the one who is deluded by this world is like the one who has been deceived by a mirage in the desert: **"Know that the life of this world is only play, and idle talk, and pageantry, and boasting among you, and rivalry in respect of wealth and children..."** (Hadid 20)**.**

A hadith also affirms the same meaning: "For those people devoted to the next world, this world is filled with condemnation. However, for those who are in love with this world, the next world is condemned."

❁

Fatima, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad, may Allah be pleased with her, asked for a servant from the Prophet ﷺ and said:

– Hasan and Husayn are so vibrant and my body is so weak.

The Prophet ﷺ said:

– Daughter! If you want, I can give you more than one servant but know with certainty that you cannot find comfort in both worlds. If you patiently endure the trial of this world, you will realize comfort in the next world.

According to another narration, Fatima came to the Prophet ﷺ and showed him her wounded hands from making flour with a hand mill and from retrieving water from the well. She requested a helper. The Prophet ﷺ answered:

– How can you make such a request while the people of Suffah are living in poverty and while the orphans of the martyrs of the battle of Badr still suffer in poverty?

Today, we must ask ourselves what is the scope of our understanding of brotherhood, sharing, self-sacrifice and

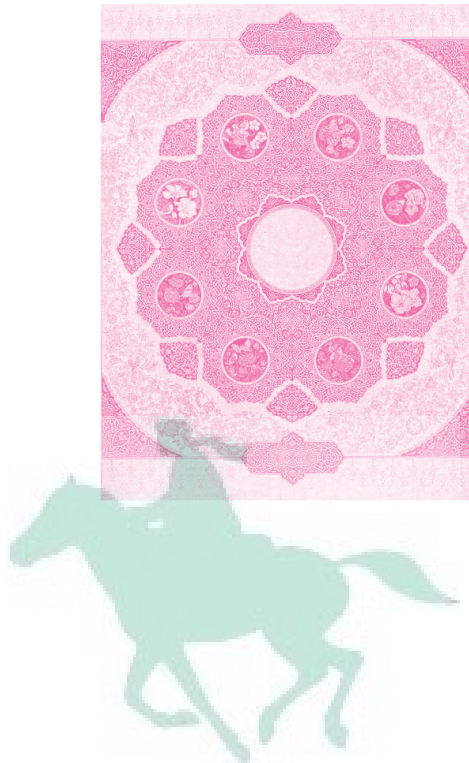
charity while many of our brothers and sisters are subjected to the ravages of oppression, cold, hunger, thirst, and homelessness.

On how many days and with how many of the poor, have we shared a meal? How many of the ill, have we helped to cure? How many people's problems have been solved with our help and support? How many misguided people have received guidance from us, because we opened our hearts to them and strove to assist them? Do we stop to ask why we are in this world? Do we ever stop to contemplate the mystery of our birth or the mystery of the adventure that will ensue subsequent to our death? How will our fate meet us? How many hours of the twenty-four we are given each day, do we spend in remembrance of the sacred? Are we engaged in soul searching or not?

O Lord! Confer on us a portion of your true love and raise us to be among those of your true servants whose hearts are full of your love. Bless us with a taste of mercy and charity of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Amen!

# The Lie in the Mirror



*Look, O disciple, at the beauty in the mirror!*
*But do not be deceived by the lie in it,*
*For the beauty of youth will fade,*
*And the solid structure will collapse.*

Rumi

This world is a realm of trials and passions. At first, we may note a pleasant, sweet smell. It strikes us as a source of ever-fresh joy and pleasure. Yet it is a trap for those who have not overcome their base desires. It is as a mirage in a desert that looks like sweet water, or as a candy apple is to children; the exterior is sweet and rich with beautiful, merry colors while the inside is sour and sore. It bewitches its lover and ultimately makes him or her miserable. Those who are deceived by its appearance will be at a loss in their life in the next world and the consequence will be a sense of remorse that will last for eternity.

A human being is a small model of a vastly larger universe. His delicate and simple existence is blessed by the honor of being the "vicegerent of Allah". If a human being is nourished by moral and spiritual food, he will become the most honored creature in the universe. However, if he is enslaved by his base desires, he will become miserable and afflicted with an everlasting bankruptcy– the worst of its kind. Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* elucidated this issue as

follows: "The chief is the one who controls his desires; and the slave is the one who is enslaved by his desires."

One cannot lead an honorable life without prior serious preparation and a conscious faith. Surely, we will watch on the screen of the Last Day, the sins we commited on earth while walking heedlessly around. For each of us, the future holds a night of death, the morning of which is the Day of Resurrection. As a learning device we can remember that what belongs to the body inevitably decays and that what we achieve in this world will be deposited in our account in the next world.

One cannot make the spiritual journey from the world of shadows to the world of eternal realities unless the mind, pressed by the two mysteries of birth and death, clearly realizes spiritually the meaning of this life and in accordance with this realization places the whole of life in order.

The time and place for performing good deeds that will reap profits in the next world is now. It is self evident that our limited time to the extent possible must be spent in performing beneficial acts. Time is like wet soap. It is difficult to keep in hand because it always escapes our grasp. Similarly, time is like a sword. One needs skill to effectively control it. Putting it to good use requires preference for the good while surrendering ourselves to what is highest. This is what every mind that has attained to Truth, yearns for and commands.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "Those who postpone their rightful tasks will be destroyed."

It is ironic that a human being, who has only come to this world as a visitor for a short period, deceives himself in it. Although he may observe funerals daily, he thinks that his meeting with death is always far in the future. In his

confusion, he believes that he is the genuine owner of the trust that may be taken away from him at any moment by his Creator. A human being in reality, after being dressed with a body and sent to this world, is a traveler towards death. He is irrevocably on a march towards death although he never reminds himself of this inevitability. At the appointed moment his soul will be separated from his body. All of his acquaintances will wish him farewell at his grave, which will be his doorway to the Hereafter. Allah proclaims in the Qur'an: **"He whom We bring unto old age, We reverse him in creation (making him go back to weakness after strength). Have they then no sense?"** (Yasin, 68).

This verse offers profound advice for every human being. The most distinguishing attribute of this world is its disloyalty. It repossesses so quickly, whatever it has given. If you run after it, it will forever recede from your grasp. When you attempt to escape from the matters of this world, it will relentlessly pursue you and catch you. The character of its behavior is essentially disloyal, for it will quickly betray whoever has relied on it.

In contrast, for those who have overcome the obstacle of base desires, time is the most important of gifts that cannot bear comparison with any other divine gift. Allah begins the Surah al-'Asr with an oath on time. Almost every thing is possible to purchase or replace. However, this is never true of time.

One state of affairs that people most resent is the waste of time. The one who knows the meaning of death will not be deceived by temporary pleasures; the one who understands the function of a hotel will not be deceived by any of the objects in it. For, all that is in the hotel belongs not to the guest but rather to the owner of the hotel. Even

if all the pleasures of this world were to be given to one person alone and he was permitted to live for a thousand years, what would be its use as long as the end was death? Ultimately, won't we eventually all reach our destinations underground in our graves?

The eternal life can only be attained at the cost of overcoming our base desires through liberating ourselves from being enslaved by false and transient pleasures while simultaneously following the orders of Allah.

A great Sufi once said that this world, for those gifted with intelligence, is an exhibition filled with lessons. However, for those destined to lack brightness of intellect it is a never-ending feast of pleasures. The life that is led for the purpose of satisfying base desires is a trap leading to one's final destruction.

❁

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* explained with the examples below the nature of youth and the adventure behind it.

*You, the one who admires the beauty of spring! Look also at the way it fades during the fall.*

*When you see the sunrise, bring to mind the sunset that is its death.*

*When you watch the full moon on a beautiful night, remember its weakness and shrinking towards the end of the month and its longing for the state of full moon.*

*The human being also passes through the same adventure. His perfection and beauty are also transient.*

*A beautiful child is the beloved of the people. After some time, as he ages, he becomes an old dotard who is miserable in the eyes of the people.*

*If you are attracted by the beautiful with silver skin, look at them after they get old. See how their bodies become like cotton fields.*

*O the one who admires the delicious food with honey and butter! Go to the toilet and see its end.*

*Ask, where is your beauty, the pleasing view and the nice smell?*

*The reply: The things you counted were rosebuds. And I was a trap. When you fell in the trap, the rosebuds faded, melted and became garbage.*

*Many hands that earn the admiration won by skilled artisans eventually are inflicted with shaking.*

*Likewise, recall how eyes as bright as glass with faces of marigolds eventually become blurred with tears flowing from them.*

*Similarly, on the appointed day, a soldier with the likes of a lion will fall to a weakling with the likes of a mouse.*

*Also, observe how even a skilled artist eventually becomes powerless and of no use.*

*In the same way, a lock of hair with the fragrance of musk that has the power to make people go crazy in their youth, becomes in due course ugly like the tail of a donkey.*

*Look at the initially beautiful state of all these things. Then, bring to mind how they inevitably fade and decay.*

*This world has already set up its trap for you by which it has deceived and destroyed many young souls.*

*Travel through all parts of the world and observe the initial and final states of all created things.*

*Whoever is saved from being enslaved by flesh and from being deceived by the shadows of existence grows close to Allah.*

*Look at the face attractive people with moon like faces who are proud of their beauty. But at the same time look at their end as well so that you do not become like Satan who has only a single eye.*

*Satan saw Adam's earthliness, but he did not see his high qualities. He only saw the mud of this world. He was blind to his spirituality that belongs to the next world. What Satan failed to understand was that the human being is the representative of Allah (Khalifatullah).*

*O human being! From this world come two voices with conflicting messages that reach our ears. To which one of them will you lend your ear?*

*One of the voices reflects the consciousness of those close to Allah while the other voice reflects the thought of those who have been deceived by this world.*

*When you have accepted one these voices, you will not even hear the other.*

*This is because when we love something we become blind and deaf to its faults.*

*Look, O disciple, at the beauty in the mirror! But do not be deceived by the lie in it, for the beauty of youth will fade, and all solid structures will collapse.*

*Happy is the one who hears what the soldiers of Truth have previously borne testimony to.*

The opposite voices Rumi has alluded to are attraction to and hatred of this world. When your ear is drawn to the voice of one of them, you become the opponent of the other. In a hadith it has been recorded that the Prophet ﷺ said: "This life and the life to come are like a man's two wives. To the extent you please one, you draw on yourself the anger of the other".

In other words, if the call to this world becomes rooted in your heart, the voice of the Hereafter will not have an impact on it. Similarly, if the voice of the Hereafter becomes rooted in one's heart, then the call to this world will be alien to him.

When a heart is stained by attraction to this world, it is a great challenge to clean it. Similar to the purification of metals with fire, such a heart needs to ignite in order to be cleansed of its bad manners. The place for this is *Jahannam*.

The counsel of the exalted teacher Fariduddin, may Allah be pleased with him, on how to reach to the spiritual world is remarkable in its beauty:

*"After the Qur'an and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ there is not any discourse that is more beautiful than the discourse of the friends of Allah. This is because their speech is a reflection of inner divine knowledge. It is not the words of a learned person; rather their speech is a gift from Allah. For this reason, they are called the heirs of the prophets. The hearts of those touched by their speech become full of divine inspiration. They are re-energized as they fill with light and spiritual secrets are revealed to them. In the process of this transformation they are protected from the*

*whispers of Satan as they are freed from enslavement to mundane desires.*

*The saints reflect the qualities of the prophets; some of them reflect the qualities of Adam, some of them reflect the qualities of Ibrahim, some reflect the qualities of Musa or Isa while some reflect the qualities of Muhammad, ﷺ. Some of them are people of knowledge, some of them are people of love, some of them are people of social interaction while some of them are people immersed in reunion with Allah; some of them reflect no qualities, that is they are hidden in nothingness."*

❁

Aziz Mahmud Hudayi, who gave guidance to the sultans of this world while making them watch the other world in the mirror of their hearts, has described this world and the next one in the following poem:

*Who expects loyalty from you,*
*Are you not the fake world?*
*Are you not the world*
*That took away Muhammad Mustafa?*

*Be gone, O disloyal one, be gone!*
*You are like an old, decrepit, abandoned woman.*
*Are you not the world*
*That has outlived countless people?*

*You attack the hearts of people,*
*You fill their eyes with soil.*
*Are you not the world*
*That smiles at the face of heedless ones?*

*Whether one is a sultan or a slave,*
*You send everyone away.*
*Are you not the world of devastation*
*In which no one can permanently reside?*

*You make some happy,*
*You make some cry,*
*But are you not the world*
*That eventually forces us to lose our innocence?*

*You are full of lies,*
*You are only what remains.*
*Are you not the world,*
*That things endlessly enter and exit?*

In a similar manner, Yunus has said:

*Show me a building,*
*Whose end is not devastation!*
*Show me a property you earned with great effort,*
*That will endure without being shattered!*

Necip Fazil, may Allah be pleased with him, has expressed in the form of a beautiful poem that life's real objective should be to prepare for the Hereafter:

*The miserly banker! Find a different wallet for yourself,*

*And save the kind of currency that is accepted in the grave!*

Why do people fail to learn the lesson that the freshness and dynamism of each transient being will be ground in the mill of time! See how vast of an illusion it is to live in this world without thinking about the life to come

and in its stead only spending time preoccupied with transient toys and praises!

A heedless life consists of play during childhood, lustful ventures during youth, and heedless activities during the years of maturity and resentment for lost opportunities during old age. It is filled with vanity and many forms of resentment. Death is waiting in hiding. Yet the foolish one is struggling to escape its grasp as he is busy with his own pride and does not want to hear the voices of the troubled ones; his heart has no mercy and he never remembers Allah. The life of those who try to live a happy life in this world without remembering the Hereafter and who struggle to enjoy the momentary pleasures of this world until the last minute is a scene of tragic devastation.

People are usually enslaved by the lie in the mirror that is a master of guises and tricks. Filled with lies, is it not but an arena filled solely with disloyalty and deception?

Yunus Emre has impressively captured in his poetry the adventure of those people who have momentarily resided in this world and have since departed:

*Those who resided in this fake world and left,*
*Never speak nor send news,*
*The ones on whose grave many kinds of plants grow,*
*Never speak nor send news.*

*A tree grows above the head of some,*
*Flowers fade above some,*
*The brave people, innocent and beautiful,*
*Never speak nor send news.*

*Their delicate bodies are covered by dust,*
*Their sweet tongues can no longer talk,*
*Do not forget to include them in your prayers,*
*They never speak nor send news.*

*Some are four years old while some are five,*
*Some have no crown on their heads,*
*Some are six, some are seven years old,*
*They never speak nor send news.*

*Some are merchants some are scholars,*
*It is difficult to swallow the drink of death,*
*Some have white beards, and some are very old,*
*They never speak nor send news.*

*Yunus says, perceive them as the work of destiny,*
*Their eyebrows and their eyelashes have decayed,*
*There are stones with inscriptions beside their heads,*
*They never speak nor send news.*

O Lord! Save us from the fate of those who plummet into this world and destroy their lives in a mere cup of water haring forgotten the oceans of the divine. You are the most Merciful!

Amen!

# Love and Hatred

*Do not be deceived,*
*O human being, by the pride and fun of this world!*
*Do not be afraid,*
*even if your body is cut to pieces in a dream,*
*for this world is but a dream!*

Rumi

There is nothing more effective than love and hatred in elevating or debasing human life. Loving what deserves to be loved and hating what deserves to be hated elevates life, while the antithesis is degrading to the extreme.

Pharaoh was surprised and shocked by Musa's effort عليه السلام to spread faith in the oneness of Allah. For this reason he appealed to his magicians for help and had them channel their forces against him. At the beginning of this struggle the magicians kindly asked:

– O Musa, are you going to throw first, or should we?

Musa عليه السلام said to them:

**– "Throw what you want to throw!"** ('Araf 115-116)**.**

The magicians threw some strings and sticks on the ground in front of Pharaoh and the people of Egypt. They began to move like snakes. Following this, Musa عليه السلام similarly threw his staff on the ground at the order of Allah. The staff became a great serpent that swallowed the instruments they had used in making magic. The magicians immediately recognized that what Musa عليه السلام had performed could not

possibly have been magic, but instead was a divine miracle; for had it been but magic, the sticks and strings would not have disappeared after their magic was undone. Yet in this instance, they totally disappeared. The magicians who witnessed this divine miracle then professed:

**– "We believe in the Lord of the Worlds, the Lord of Musa and Harun"** ('A'raf 121)**.**

At their declaration of faith, the Pharaoh became furious and pronounced:

– "Ye believe in Him before I give you leave! Lo! This is a plot that ye have spun in the city that ye may drive its inhabitants hence. But ye shall come to know. Surely I shall have your hands and feet cut off on alternate sides. Then I shall crucify everyone of you."

The magicians, who had already spiritually risen beyond such mundane matters, replied to the Pharaoh:

**– "Lo! We are about to return to our Lord! Thou takest vengeance on us only for as much as we believed in the tokens of our Lord when they came unto us. Our Lord! Vouchsafe unto us steadfastness and make us die as men who have surrendered (unto Thee)"** ('A'raf 126).

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* poetically renders the words of the magicians as follows:

*The magicians said, "The punishment inflicted by Pharaoh is of no harm to us for the grace of Allah prevails over the violence of (all) others.*

*If you should (come to) know our secret, O misleader, (you would see that) you are delivering us from pain, O man, whose heart is blind.*

*Hark, come and from this quarter behold this organ peeling 'oh, would that my people knew!'*

*Allah's bounty has bestowed upon us a pharaohship, (but) not a perishable one like your pharaohship and kingdom.*

*Lift up your head and behold the living and the majestic kingdom, O you who has been deluded by Egypt and the river Nile.*

*If you will take leave of this filthy tattered cloak you will be drawn from the (bodily) Nile to the Nile of the spirit.*

*Hark, O pharaoh, hold your hand from (renounce) Egypt: There are a hundred Egypts within the Egypt of the spirit.*

*You say to the vulgar, 'I am a Lord,' being unaware of the essential natures of both these names.*

*It is in thanks for our deliverance from this perishable abode that we are (now) admonishing you on this gallows.*

*The gallows on which we are killed is the Buraq on which we ride (to Heaven); the abode possessed by you is but a product of delusion and heedlessness.*

Rumi analyzes the inner spiritual dimension of this dialogue between Pharaoh and the magicians who had borne witness to the Truth as follows:

*Is it not (the fact) that the accursed Pharaoh threatened (the magicians with) punishment on the earth,*

*Saying, "I will cut off your hands and feet on opposite sides, then I will hang you up: I will not hold you exempt (from punishment)"?*

*He thought that they were (still) in the same state of imagination, terror, distraction, and doubt,*

*Thus, that they would be trembling and terrified before the vain imaginings and threats of the carnal soul.*

*He did not know that they had been delivered and seated at the window of the light of the heart,*

*(And that) they had recognized (the difference of) their (bodily) shadows from their (real) selves, and were vivaciously alive, alert, happy, and exalted.*

That means they understood that the human body is but a shadow; they sacrificed this shadow and reached to the state of *fanafillah*. Rumi continues:

*O human being! This world is made of but sleep and dream. Do not be deceived by the false glory and fun in it! Do not be afraid even if in your dream your hand is cut off or your body is chopped to pieces. The Prophet said of this world, which is seemingly substantial in appearance, that "this world is the sleeper's dream."*

The great poet Yunus Emre has beautifully articulated his refuge in Allah:

*For the ones with spiritual knowledge,*
*This world is a dream and figment of the imagination.*
*The one who sacrifices himself for Your sake*
*Transcends dream and imagination!*

❁

We have witnessed in this story how the modicum of kindness and respect shown by the magicians to Musa ﷺ bestowed upon them the gift of faith and they subsequently abandoned mundane pleasures, which they perceived to be

merely a dream, for the ceaseless life of eternal happiness. The life of the Pharaoh, on the other hand, continued to unfold and ultimately took the shape, after having been drawn into the whirlpools of the Red Sea, of a journey into Hellfire. The fame he left behind became nothing more than an epitome of oppression.

Rumi said, "The intelligent cry first but they eventually smile. The unintelligent, however, laugh first but eventually they cry and hit their heads with stones. One should struggle to foresee the end of a matter at the outset, so that you won't later come to resent the outcome."

The foundation of mundane life, therefore, consists of figures of imagination, of feelings and of thoughts that lead to action. Human beings by nature are intrinsically subject to swings between love and hatred. However, the prophets and the saints are the suns who set life in its true orbit. They bring life to the dead hearts of humanity as springs impart life to the soil. They turn hearts to Allah after filling them with divine knowledge. In the radiance of their breath, humankind is thus oriented to the purpose for which it was ordained and thereby finds ultimate contentment.

In pre-eternity, this world of diversity and plurality came into existence out of love. Among all created forms, human beings and the jinns have been fashioned in such a way that their passion for love can only be satisfied through the love of Allah. Human beings are actually in a state of exile, in relation to the realms they have come from. Their pain and their distress can only be cured by a deep and abiding love for Allah.

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* said: "The prophets and their heirs, that is those beings who have attained to states of perfection, are suns veiled by the mask of humanity. One

should seek refuge in them so as to be saved from bondage to the flesh and from bondage to the fleeting objects of this world.

A Sufi disciple came to Bayazid Bestami and asked for his advice:

– Recommend to me an act that will bring me closer to the Lord!

Bayazid, advised him as follows:

– Love the friends of Allah! And try to gain their love, for Allah's glance falls on their hearts every day three hundred and sixty times! This way He will see you in their hearts.

Sulaiman ﷺ sent a letter to the Queen of Saba requesting her to accept the true faith. When she read the letter, she, who was an idol worshipper, said:

– Gentlemen, honorable guests! A valuable letter has reached me. It is from Sulaiman. It begins with the name of Allah who is the Most Compassionate and the Most Merciful.

She showed respect to the letter of Sulaiman. Some scholars have said that since she showed respect to Sulaiman's letter, she was blessed by the true faith.

❁

Similarly, one day on his way home while he was wandering around in a drunken state, Bishr-i Khafi saw a piece of paper on the ground with the Kelime-i Tawhid written on it. Regardless of his state, his heart was unable to tolerate these holy words remaining in that position. He lifted the piece of paper up with great respect, cleaned it and put pleasing perfumes on it. He then hung it in the

best place in his home. For this reason, Allah ultimately granted him spiritual guidance and he attained to the rank of sainthood.

Likewise, there was a companion with the name Hakim ibn Hizam. He was a relative of Khadija, the wife of the Prophet ﷺ and was renowned for his mercy and generosity. Before the rise of Islam, he used to buy the daughters of those families who wanted to bury them alive and graciously assumed the responsibility of watching over them. Hakim ibn Hizam asked the Prophet ﷺ about these good deeds which he had done prior to his declaration of faith in Islam. The Prophet ﷺ replied:

– These good deeds are but the reasons that brought you the honor of being blessed with Islam.

It should never be forgotten that the secrets of our existence reside solely in spiritually pure hearts. The prosperity of the Ottoman Empire for six hundred years, which in duration is beyond comparison with any other state in history, was in fact due to their emphasis on spirituality. According to a well-known tradition, Osman Ghazi, the founder of the Ottoman State, spent a night standing awake in his room, in a house where he had been invited to stay as a guest, because there was a copy of the Holy Qur'an in it. Likewise, Yavuz Sultan Selim Khan brought the Sacred Trusts from the Hijaz to Istanbul with the greatest respect possible. He assigned forty reciters, who knew the entire Qur'an by heart, to continuously recite the Qur'an day and night in the room where the Sacred Trusts were preserved. This custom continued for ages and demonstrates to us one of the fundamental reasons why the Ottoman State survived for such a long period of time.

The Almighty Allah has always bestowed prosperity upon those who have demonstrated respect for Him, for His messengers and for His friends, and has always showered them with divine mercy. For instance, He did not punish the polytheists of Mecca while the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was living there. The following verse from the Qur'an states this fact:

**"Allah will not punish them while you reside among them"** (Anfal, 33)

However, when the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ migrated to Medina, the Meccan populace suffered from famine. They became so weak that they could not even raise their heads to behold the sky. It was as though they had become blind and perceived the sky as a white cloud. Since they were unable to find any solution for the famine, they travelled to Medina and asked Prophet Muhammad ﷺ for help.

These events, which carry an intrinsic warning, serve as a means of guidance for those who have the ability to perceive; but for those who do not have this potential, they may function to increase their misery in both this world and the world to come. The following narrative carries a significant lesson for us:

Jabala, who was the governor of the Ghassanis in Syria, came to Medina and accepted Islam during the time of Caliph Umar. He wanted to perform pilgrimage and for this purpose dressed in the special ceremonial cloth called "ihram". During the circumambulation (tawaf) of the Ka'aba a bedouin stepped on his silk ihram. Jabala became so angry that he slapped him on his face. The bedouin thereupon approached Caliph Umar and complained about this treatment. Umar said to Jabala:

– Either you will pay enough compensation to the bedouin to secure his happiness or he will slap your face sufficiently to gain his due.

Jabala said:

– I am a governor; he is a simple bedouin.

Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, said:

– There is no such thing in Islam. In the eye of divine justice you are equal.

Then Jabala said:

– Let me think about this predicament tonight.

Because of his pride, Jabala could not reconcile himself with the act of paying money to the bedouin for the purpose of making him content and thereby enticing him to withdraw his case against him. Rather, he fled from Medina in the night with his people. He sought refuge in Byzantium and abandoned his newly won Islamic faith. After a period of time, he died. His pride had caused him to stray from the enlightened path of Islam. He had been deceived by his base desires and thus deservedly earned punishment in the Hellfire.

Another example, bestowing a similar moral lesson, may be found in the following story:

The King of Iran (Kisra) tore up the letter sent to him by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and uttered words of insult on it. As a consequence, Allah would later shatter his kingdom to pieces. The devastation brought down on his empire has been recorded in the pages of history for those seeking such a teaching.

Rumi has addressed the following lines to those who have been deprived of the teachings of the prophets and scholars and thus have not received their due share of knowledge concerning divine secrets:

*You plan to put a faded and decayed heart on the table used for the washing of corpses and you intend to proceed with it to the presence of your Lord.*

*Allah may say to you: "You impudent and insolent individual! How can you come before me with a dead heart; is this a graveyard?*

*Go back and bring me a heart alive with divine secrets and imbued with the beauty of the spiritual worlds."*

For the purpose of further illuminating this point, Yunus Emre has written:

*I did not come to this world for a fight,*
*My sole task is love.*
*The house of the Beloved is the hearts,*
*I came to repair hearts.*

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* has repeatedly explained that the purification of the soul is essential for the cultivation of such a refined heart. The following verses are but one example:

*If a baby bird, whose wings have yet to fully develop, flies, it is destined to fall and become food for a wild cat. Yet, when its wings are allowed to mature, it flies high into the sky without difficulty.*

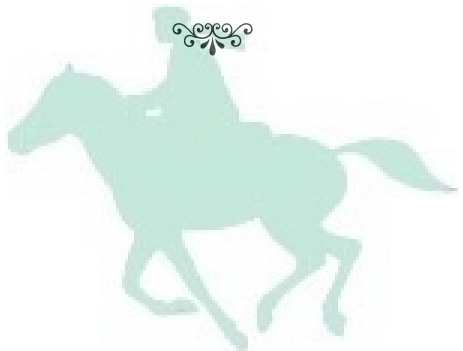
In another poem, he explains that material height is a matter of measure and cannot be compared with spiritual maturity:

*The sky is high in form. Yet, spiritual height and genuine loftiness belong to pure hearts.*

*Apparent height belongs to bodies. Yet, bodies are as names before the reality of what they spiritually point towards.*

O Lord, do not allow our hearts to be distracted from the light of the Qur'an, from the love of Your beloved Prophet Muhammad, or from the love of Your friends…

Amen!



# Being Blessed With Mercy

*If you want to please me,*
*Do not forget that it depends on pleasing people.*
Rumi

The first fruit of true faith is mercy. A heart without mercy is not alive. The formula of Basmala[7], which is uttered prior to all actions, and the Fatiha, the first chapter of the Holy Qur'an, mention the divine attributes of Rahman (the Most Merciful) and Rahim (the Most Compassionate). The life stories of the prophets and the saints are full of anecdotes pertaining to mercy.

The best way to cultivate these dual divine qualities to the point of integrating them into our character is to nurture universal love in our hearts. Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* has exemplified in the following stanzas that the ultimate truth of all acts of worship, particularly the pilgrimage, is unveiled solely through spiritual mercy:

7. Basmala is to say "Bismillahirrahmanirrahim" which means "In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate." To utter this formula with the purpose of remembering the name of Allah prior to the undertaking of a task was the habit of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Muslims continue today to follow the example of their Prophet ﷺ and they utter the Basmala prior to all actions.

*Bayazid, the sheikh of the community, was hurrying to Mecca for the greater pilgrimage (hajj) and the lesser pilgrimage ('umra).*

*In every city he visited, he would first search for the presence of venerable saints.*

*He would roam about, asking, "Who is there in this city that relies on spiritual insight?"*

*Allah has said, "Whithersoever thou goest in thy travels, thou must first seek after a holy man."*

*Search thou for a true treasure, for worldly profit and loss come second: regard them as but the branch, not as the root.*

*Whosoever sows is in quest of wheat; the chaff comes to him indeed, but only secondarily.*

*If you sow chaff, no wheat will come up; seek a man, seek a man, a man!*

*When it is the season of pilgrimage, go in quest of the Ka'aba; when you have gone for that purpose, Mecca will also be seen.*

*In the Mi'raj or ascension of the Prophet, his quest was for a vision of the Beloved; it was but secondary that the empyrean and the angels were also seen.*

*Bayazid, in the course of his journey to the Ka'aba, dearly sought to find the Khizr of his time.*

*He espied an old man with a stature bent like that of a crescent moon; he saw in him the majesty and lofty speech of holy men;*

*His eyes were sightless but his heart was illumined like the sun: like an elephant dreaming of India.*

*With closed eyes, asleep, he beholds a hundred delights: when he opens his eyes, he sees not those delights– oh it is wonderful!*

*Many a wonder is made manifest in sleep: in sleep the heart becomes a window.*

*One that is awake and dreams fair dreams, he is the knower of Allah; smear your eyes with his dust.*

*Bayazid sat down before him and asked him about his condition; he found him to be a dervish and also a family man.*

*The old man said, "Where are you bound to go, O Bayazid?" To what place would you take the baggage of travel through a strange land?"*

*Bayazid answered, "I start for the Ka'aba at daybreak." "Eh," cried the other, "What have you as provisions for the road?"*

*"I have two hundred silver dirhams," said he; "look, they are tied fast in the corner of my cloak."*

*He said, "Make a circuit round me seven times, and reckon this to be better than the circumambulation of the Ka'aba in the pilgrimage;*

*And lay those dirhams before me, O generous one. Know that you have made the greater pilgrimage and that your desire has been achieved;*

*That you have also performed the lesser pilgrimage and gained the life everlasting; that you have become pure (saf) and have sped up the hill of purity (Safa).*

*By the truth of the Truth (Allah) whom your soul has seen, I swear that He has chosen me above His House.*

*Albeit the Ka'aba is the house of His religious service, my form too, in which I was created, is the house of His inmost consciousness.*

*Since Allah made the Ka'aba, he has never gone into it, but none but the Living (Allah) has ever gone into this house of mine.*

*When you have seen me, you have seen Allah: you have circled round the Ka'aba of Sincerity.*

*To serve me is to obey and glorify Allah: beware to not think that Allah is separate from me.*

*Open your eyes well and look on me, that you may behold the Light of Allah in man."*

*Bayazid gave heed to his mystical sayings, and put them in his ear as a golden ring.*

*Through him (the old man), Bayazid grew to be more spiritually endowed; the adept at last attained unto the end.*

The reason why Rumi used the example of pilgrimage in this story is that it is a very profound form of worship. For instance, many things that might otherwise be lawful are not permitted during the pilgrimage. Furthermore, it reflects the spectacle of the Day of Resurrection. Idle talk (*rafas*) is also strictly prohibited during the pilgrimage. For this reason, one must be spiritually prepared before embarking on this journey.

As there are supererogatory (*nafilah*) forms of *salat* and fasting, so too is there a voluntary pilgrimage beyond the obligatory one. Being critical of those who perform

voluntary forms of worship is extremely dangerous and may even result in one uttering misguided remarks which might eventually carry one to the point of disbelief. Such remarks have their origin in ignorance surrounding the sheer pleasure of worship.

The non-obligatory prayers and other forms of worship have been practiced as an expression of the joy of faith since the time of the Prophet ﷺ. The voluntary prayers, performed with excitement and passion, draw the believer closer to his Creator. They purify the soul and cultivate the qualities of mercy and generosity. As this spiritual transformation deepens, one's sight and hearing grow to fall completely under the control of Allah. In other words, one sees and hears the presence of the divine reflected in everything experienced.

Such an elevated spiritual station can only be achieved through the regular performance of voluntary forms of worship side by side with an ongoing effort to serve all of creation. As an example, it is useful to point out that Abu Hanifa performed pilgrimage fifty five times.

❁

The following is a story from *Tazkirat'ul-Awliya* about the place of humans in the sight of Allah:

Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak was a scholar from the generation of the Successors (*al-Tabi'un*). This generation of Muslims immediately followed the generation of the companions. Historically, he is well known as a Sufi and *Muhaddith*. In one story pertaining to his life, he went to Mecca to perform pilgrimage. After he completed the pilgrimage, while still standing near the Ka'aba, he had a

vision in which two angels were speaking to each other. One of the angels said to the other:

– This year six hundred thousand people performed pilgrimage. Their pilgrimages have been accepted for the sake of a cobbler in Damascus named Ali ibn Muwaffaq. He had intended to go on pilgrimage but could not. Because of a good deed he performed, the pilgrimages of all the pilgrims have been accepted.

After it was over, Abdullah ibn Mubarak became very surprised by this experience. He went to Damascus with a caravan returning to that city. He searched until he found the cobbler and asked him:

– What kind of good deed did you perform, although you were subsequently unable to go on pilgrimage?

When Ali ibn Muwaffaq learned that a great scholar like Abdullah ibn Mubarak came to ask him such a question, he fainted. When his consciousness returned, he replied as follows:

– I have been trying to go on pilgrimage for the last thirty years. I managed to save three hundred dirhams through the repair of shoes during this time period and after judging it sufficient I made my intention to go on pilgrimage this year. One day my pregnant wife asked me for some meat. She said:

– The smell of meat is coming from the neighbor. Bring me some meat.

I went to my neighbor and explained to him the situation. My neighbor cried and exclaimed:

– For the past seven days, my children have been hungry. I found a dead animal on the street and cut a piece

from it. Now, I am boiling it to keep my children from feeling their hunger. If I cannot find lawful food, I will feed my children with this meat instead. If you want, I can give the meat to you too, but it is unlawful for you although it is lawful for the children because they are at the verge of death due to their hunger.

Ali ibn Muwaffaq continued as follows:

– After I heard his remarks, my heart shattered into pieces. I donated the three hundred dirhams that I had been saving for the last thirty years and then I prayed to Allah, "O Allah, accept my intention to perform the pilgrimage."

Abdullah ibn Mubarak said to him:

– In a vision I had while on the pilgrimage, the Lord showed me the truth of what you have said.

This magnificent incident is symbolic of the significance of mercy in our spiritual lives. Let us be successful in taking the lesson we need from it so that our lives may too be touched by the blessings of the Lord's boundless mercy.

From another perspective, the pilgrimage metaphorically represents a journey away from bodily form coupled with a serious effort to distance oneself from the winds of sensual desires. Yunus Emre, who had a very sensitive heart, expressed it as follows:

*An old scholar with a white beard,*
*Yet he does not know his spiritual state,*
*He should not waste his time and energy,*
*if he would break a heart.*

*The heart is the throne of Allah,*
*For, the Almighty looks at the heart.*

*The loser in both worlds*
*is the one who breaks a heart.*

❁

The following story about Bayazid Bistami is well known for illustrating that one cannot reach high levels of spiritual attainment only by virtue of externally improving oneself.

One day, one of the disciples of Bayazid asked him:

– Will you give a piece of your coat so that I can carry it with me to gain blessing?

Bayazid responded:

– O my son, if you do not improve yourself until you become a perfect person, it is not going to help you even if you cover your entire body with my skin.

❁

Bayazid Bistami, may Allah be pleased with him, was on a trip. He rested briefly under a tree before continuing his journey.

After resuming his trip, he saw some ants on his bag. He felt sorry for having separated the ants from their home and families. He was so deeply moved by the thought of their separation that he returned to the tree under which he had rested and returned them to the very point his bag had been sitting.

Junayd Baghdadi, *quddisa sirruh,* fell asleep one morning on his cloak before departing for the mosque for the morning prayer. Shortly thereafter, a cat lied down beside him and fell asleep. On seeing the situation, he decided not to disturb the cat's sleep. Instead, he contemplated performing the prayer without his mantle,

but ultimately decided it was inappropriate. Finally, he elected to slowly cut off the piece where the cat was resting so as to not wake it up, put the cloak on and then proceeded to the mosque. While walking to the mosque, the cat continued to sleep comfortably.

These incidents, borne of boundless love for the Creator, demonstrate unconditional love for the creatures of the earth and serve to illustrate the fathomless depth of heart that exists in a believer who is close to Allah.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said: "A careless woman who caused the death of her cat by not feeding it will be punished in the Hellfire. On the contrary, a sinful woman, who gave water to a thirsty dog, is to be forgiven by Allah."

In another tradition, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said: "Treat those on earth with mercy, so that the One in the Heavens treats you with mercy."

Bayazid Bistami, *quddisa sirruh,* narrated:

"There were thousands of saints in our time. Their leader was a blacksmith. I went to his shop to learn his secret. I perceived that he was in great sorrow and asked the reason. He said:

– Is there a concern greater than mine? Is there anyone else whose pain is greater than mine? My grief arises from thinking what is to befall all these servants of Allah on the Day of Judgment.

Then he began to cry, which caused me cry too. My curiosity drove me to ask him the following question:

– Why are you so distressed about the punishment of other people?

Abu Hafs replied:

– The fabric of my nature is composed solely of mercy and compassion. If the entire punishment to be meted out to the people destined for Hell could but be given to me so that they would be saved from His wrath, I would be happy.

I realized that Abu Hafs was not someone prone to bemoan his own misery. Instead, it was his nature to cry out "O my community! O my community!" as was the case of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ who was known for the same trait. I stayed with him for a while. I was teaching him the recitation of some chapters of the Qur'an, but in reality, he was demonstrating to me how to put them into practice. He unveiled many points that I had been unable to understand for the duration of my life through the study of rational sciences. Through this association with him, my heart was filled with divinely inspired knowledge. I came to perceive directly that one can't become the leader of the saints (i.e. the *qutb*) solely through mere knowledge and prayer, but rather it arises through putting that knowledge into practice and ultimately through being blessed with inner knowledge only accessible by virtue of the direct assistance of Allah. The reason why Abu Hafs was given this knowledge was because mercy and compassion became his second nature.

This mercy and compassion is best symbolized after the Prophet ﷺ by Abu Bakr, may Allah be pleased with him. He used to pray meticulously for the salvation of the entirety of humanity on the Day of Judgment.

There were many manifestations of Abu Bakr's mercy. One of them may be seen in the way he bought Bilal, the

slave of Umeyye ibn Khalaf, and set him free. This act of compassion brought him the praise of the Prophet ﷺ.

In the Mathnawi, Rumi narrates this story as a poem. The following is a long excerpt from it.

❁

*When Mustafa (Muhammad) returned to earth after the Ascension, since he had heard the sound of the footsteps of Bilal in the heavens he pronounced on him the blessing: "May Allah bless you!, May Allah bless you!"*

*On hearing this ecstatic utterance from Bilal, in whose speech there was no guile, the Siddiq (Abu Bakr) washed his hands of urging him to repent.*

*Afterwards, the Siddiq related to Mustafa the plight of the faithful Bilal,*

*Saying, "That Heaven-surveying nimble (spirit) of blessed wing is at this time in love with you and in your net.*

*The owls are tormenting the sultan's falcon, that grand treasure is buried in filth.*

*The owls are doing violence to the falcon: they are tearing out his plums and feathers though he is innocent.*

*They are crucifying him (Bilal), his face to the east, and flogging his naked body with a thorny branch.*

*The blood is spurting from his body in a hundred places, (while) he is crying "One!" and bowing his head (in resignation).*

*Mustafa (the Prophet) said to him, "Now what is the remedy?" He (the Siddiq) replied, "This servant of Allah is going to buy him.*

*I will buy him at whatever price the owner may name: I will not regard the apparent loss of money and the extortion;*

*For he is Allah's captive on the earth, and he has become subjected to the anger of Allah's enemy."*

*Mustafa said to him, "O seeker of spiritual fortune, I will be your partner in this enterprise.*

*Be my agent, buy a half share in him on my account, and receive the payment from me."*

*He replied, "I will do my utmost to serve you." Then he went to the house of the merciless owner.*

*He said to himself, "From the hands of children one can buy pearls very cheaply, O father."*

*From these foolish children the ghoul-like Devil is buying their reason and faith in exchange for the kingdom of this world.*

*He knocked the door-ring, and when the owner opened the door he (the Siddiq) went into his house, beside himself with indignation.*

*He sat down, beside himself and furious and full of fire: from his mouth leaped many bitter words–*

*"Why are you beating this friend of Allah? What hatred is this, O enemy of the Light?*

*If you are steadfast in your own religion, how is your heart consenting to maltreat him who is steadfast (in his religion)?*

*O you effeminate in your religion, who does not impute this same effeminacy to a spiritual prince!*

*Do not view all things in the distorting mirror of your selfhood, O you who are banned with an everlasting curse!*

*He (the owner) said, "If you are feeling pity for him, give me gold and take him in exchange, O man of generous disposition.*

*Since your heart is burning with sympathy, ransom him from me: your difficulty will not be solved without expense."*

*He offered him in addition a nisab (two hundred dirhams) of silver, so that the owner's cupidity was satisfied.*

*The stonyhearted owner guffawed jeeringly and mockingly in malice and spite.*

*The Siddiq said to him, "Why this laughter?" In reply to the question, he laughed more loudly.*

*And said, "Had it not been for the extraordinary earnestness and ardour shown by you in the purchase of this black slave,*

*I would not have wrangled excitedly: indeed I would have sold him for a tenth of this sum.*

*For in my opinion he is not worth half a dang; (but) you made his price heavy by your clamor."*

*Then the Siddiq answered him, "O simpleton, you have given away a pearl in exchange for a walnut, like a silly boy;*

*For in my opinion he is worth the two worlds: I am regarding his spirit, you his color.*

*He is red gold that has been made like black polished iron on account of the enviousness of this abode of fools.*

*You gave him up easily because you got him cheap; you did not see the pearl, you did not split the casket.*

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* through the actions he has recorded in this story, gives us a true taste for genuine mercy and compassion. Furthermore, he has explicitly described how the value of a human being is beyond measurement. Everything in this world is of no value beside the value of a spirit that has risen to the horizons of boundlessness.

My teacher Yaman Dede used to be an Orthodox Christian. He found guidance through the fruits of Rumi's *Mathnawi*. His heart was so sensitive and full of fire with love for Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that he completely internalized the manners of the Prophet ﷺ and his companions. The following incident suffices to illustrate his spiritual state:

One day, a student in class asked him:

– Teacher, would you prefer to commit a sin or to suffer from leprosy.

Yaman Dede answered:

– I would prefer being burned to dust rather than falling away through carelessness, even for a brief moment, from my bond to the Prophet ﷺ and the spiritual worlds of the friends of Allah!

What clearer expression of the endless mercy and love embodied by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ could there be?

O Allah, may Your mercy become the endless treasure of our hearts.

Amen!

# Be a Human,

# a Human!

*Go to the graveyard.*
*Sit there for a while in silence.*
*Listen to the voices of the mute!*
Rumi

A man came to a big city. While visiting the market place, he went to the street where the perfume vendors were located. The street was filled with the attar of roses and other fragrances. The man walked a few steps. The overwhelmingly wonderful aromas made him feel dizzy. He could not help but faint.

People gathered around him. They were trying to help him; some were checking his heart; some were rubbing his wrists, while some were washing his face with rose water. Nothing succeeded in helping him return to waking consciousness. All efforts proved to be fruitless; special medicinal perfumes and rose water were all employed in vain. On the contrary, his condition became even worse. Eventually, when they realized that they could not help, they decided to call his relatives but were unable to locate any. In the afternoon, a tanner was passing by. He recognized the man. He approached the crowd and said:

– Absolutely don't pour rose water on him! I know what his illness is! Do not touch him! I will return soon and solve the problem.

The tanner left and soon returned with some dung in his hand. He brought the dung close to the nose of the man. Surprisingly, the comatose man came back to himself. After some time, he stood up and walked away with the tanner.

The cause behind this unlikely cure was that the man who had fainted was also a tanner. He was accustomed for years to the rancid smell of unprocessed leather. When he entered the perfume market, he could not withstand the wonderful aromas and consequently fainted.

**THE MATHNAWI:**

*The tanner, from carrying dung, has come to resemble the dung beetle: The dung beetle is driven to insensibility by rosewater.*

*The remedy for him consists of the same dog's dung to which he has become accustomed.*

*Mentors marked by their wisdom and sincerity prepare medicine for the man steeped in this world with wise, beautiful worlds and ambergris or rosewater to open the gates of divine Mercy;*

*But such sweet words and remedies will not suffice for those who have been swallowed by this world: It is neither fitting nor suitable, O you trustworthy ones!*

*Strive in this short life to receive your share of spiritual light, spiritual admonition, goodness and*

*beauty! Do not bury your nose in filth like the dung beetle!* ***Be a human, a human!***

❁

The morning wind is permeated by beautiful fragrances after it has gently blown through gardens of flowers and roses. Men with pure hearts overflowing with the true knowledge of Allah similarly are imbued with love and ecstasy that may be experienced when in association with them. The secrets of their hearts are perceptible to the degree of the observer's ability to taste what emanates from them. We must remember that the dog of the Seven Sleepers (*Ashab al-Kahf*) will enter Paradise because of the loyalty that drove it to wait at the entrance to its masters' cave.

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* narrates this story as follows:

*The dog of the Companions of the Cave (Seven Sleepers) was freed from impurity because of love. It was seated at the table of the king.*

*That dog was blessed with the drink of divine mercy because it chose to wait at the gate of their cave without food.*

Similarly but in a contrary sense, a wind that passes through a rotten group of people is impressed by their putrid eminations. The strength of this wind may wax and wane, but ultimately the wind touches other people and spreads discomfort among them.

What radiates outward from the circles of hypocrites, who have had stolen from them the spiritual pleasures of service and worship, is darkness of heart. They share the

darkness of their hearts and find pleasure in this companionship.

The great teacher Rumi said: "Go to the graveyard. Sit there for a while in silence. Listen to the voices of the mute!"

As it is impossible to keep a rat in a rose-garden, so too is it impossible to keep a bee out of its customary environment. The food of the bee is to be found in flowers. It cannot live far from them. Allah provides effortlessly for each creature through the environment that befits its nature.

Human beings are no exception to this rule.

Noble souls rich in spiritual inheritance are nourished by the divine knowledge reflected through the Prophet Muhammad, ﷺ. However, base souls are sustained by impurity.

Abu Bakr, may Allah be pleased with him, when seeing the face of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said in astonishment, "So beautiful"! Abu Jahl, on the other hand, on perceiving it felt hate. The secret behind this difference is that they both observed solely their true nature reflected in the mirror of the Prophet ﷺ.

The saints, whose role in this world is to function as the heirs of the prophets, have remarked: "We are like brightly polished mirrors in which everyone sees his own reflection."

No true mirror can either lie or distort a reflection. It is intrinsically incapable of portraying something that is ugly as though it is beautiful or vice versa. It is axiomatic that a reflection is identical in figure to what is being reflected. It

is in this capacity that the friends of Allah function. Whatever we observe in their mirrors is what is beheld in the eye of Allah. It is objective and true in the deepest sense possible. Whoever gazes into them truly observes in their visage nothing more than the reality of their being.

Sheikh Niyazi Misri, *quddisa sirruh,* has also stated that his heart functioned as a mirror:

*I am a mirror among people; whoever looks at it sees a moment.*

*Whatever he sees is nothing but a reflection of himself,*

*Whether what he sees is positive or negative.*

Rumi said:

*How shall mirror and scale stop their breath (suppress the truth) for fear of hurting or shaming any one?*

*Mirror and balance are noble touchstones: if you serve them for a hundred years,*

*Only to say, 'Conceal the truth for my sake, display the surplus and do not display deficiency,'*

*They will retort, 'do not laugh at your beard and moustache: mirror and balance, and then deceit and trickery!' (The idea that mirror and scale should deceive is absurd).*

*Since Allah has raised us up in order that by means of us it may be possible to know the truth,*

*If this does not happen (if we fail to display the truth), what worth have we O young man? How shall we become a standard for the face of the fair?*

A physically wounded or ill person cannot cure himself and thus is in need of a physician. The same is true for one who is spiritually ill or wounded; he also needs to be under the care of a perfect human (*insan-i kamil*) or a doctor who knows how to purify hearts.

Some people think that they have attained spiritual perfection and try to exhibit humility. They discuss their shortcomings and weaknesses. Yet this display is not genuine. Instead, it is only to impress others. If their true state is explored more deeply, one will come face to face with a heart full of self-love and arrogance.

Rumi said, "For this quagmire to be dried and cleaned, receiving support from and being trained by a perfect teacher is essential."

Some people think, however, that they can rise above self-love and arrogance simply by reading books. This is similar to a person who is suffering from cancer and is trying to cure himself by just studying books. Nevertheless, we must observe that even physicians enter under the care of other physicians when they suffer from illnesses. Similarly, a judge cannot try himself; instead, he has to appear before another court and rise before a different judge.

Those who try to grasp the truth solely through their own mind are like children who try to grasp the shadow of a bird flying high in the sky. In misery, such children eventually exhaust themselves in vain without even having realized that the bird is high in the sky. Not knowing the truth, they have exhausted themselves running feverishly after only an empty shadow. In the same way, shortsighted

hunters take aim at shadows and eventually their energy and arrows are exhausted without gain.

Many people have exhausted their arrows. The value of the arrows in the drama of their lives was equal to the weight of them in gold. It is analogous to children playing with plastic toys. The one who spends his entire life running after worldly gains does not realize that this world is but a shadow of the real. Therefore, it is no different than forgetting or ignoring the real while running after illusions and thus remaining in darkness with an empty hand and heart after a wasted life.

Only those true guides, who are the authorized servants of Allah alone, can save one from these illusions. These guides represent the divine light. The intelligent person follows their advices and paths in order to save himself from living a life rooted in naught. Such an existence is nothing but the vast and abiding emptiness of a life consumed by chasing empty illusions.

The feelings of arrogance, self-love, and self-praise are rooted within every individual. This arrogance originates in the superiority we see in ourselves. In spite of these deep tendencies, when we enter a genuine spiritual path we grow to realize that perfections belong only to Allah and that everything belonging to us is but a trust from our Creator.

❁

Zayd ibn Haritha, may Allah be pleased with him, was a slave who was freed by the Prophet ﷺ. He was initially bought by our blessed mother Khadija who in turn offered him as a gift to the Prophet ﷺ. After receiving him, the Prophet ﷺ granted him his freedom. Nevertheless, Zayd did

not sever his connection with him because of the unparalleled character attributes and virtues he witnessed in him; instead, he bore witness that serving him would be a greater honor and blessing. Even when his father discovered where he was and came to take him home, he refused to depart with him and said to the Prophet ﷺ:

– O the Messenger of Allah! You are everything to me! For me, there is no one in this world preferable to you.

He thus declared that he preferred to be the servant of the Prophet ﷺ over a free life with his family.

For this reason, the Prophet ﷺ loved him, cared for him and in his company shared with him great words of wisdom. Zayd, may Allah be pleased with him, used to listen to these sermons of the Prophet ﷺ with great ecstasy.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ asked him:

– What is the sign of the blooming flowers in the garden of your faith? Can you describe to me a sign of them?

He replied:

– Since I lost interest in the world, my days have been spent without water and my nights without sleep. I have passed through these days and nights just like a spear goes through a shield. I have attained to the secret of certainty in knowledge through direct experience. In the abiding moment of the arising of that awareness, I observe that time does not exist there. One hour is equal to one century. Every visible thing is but a manifestation of the One and the Unique. Day and night, do not exist there. There is only eternity with no beginning and no end. It is a world, which is beyond the horizon of limited human reason,

where there is neither time nor place. When this moment first arose, I felt as if I saw the throne of my Lord, and as if I saw the people of Paradise who visit each other and the people of Hellfire who hate each other.

Likewise, Zayd said:

– When I withdrew from the pleasures of this world, Allah bestowed a light on my heart and thus what was hidden earlier now became manifest.

Rumi explains the ecstasy of Zayd ibn Haritha in the *Mathnawi* as follows:

*Zayd asked the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ: "O Messenger of Allah, shall I tell the mystery of the Gathering (on the Day of Judgment), shall I make the Resurrection manifest to the world today?*

*Let me be, that I may rend the curtains asunder, that my spiritual substance may shine forth like a sun;*

*That the sun may be eclipsed by me, and that I may show the difference between the fruitful date palm and the barren willow.*

*I will bring forth the mystery of the Resurrection, the sterling coin and the coin mixed with alloy,*

*The people of the left (the damned) with their hands cut off; I will bring forth the colour of infidelity and the colour of the (Prophet's) followers.*

*I shall lay bare the seven rifts (sins) of hypocrisy in the light of the moon that suffers neither eclipse nor waning.*

*I shall reveal the woolen frocks of the damned, and cause the drums and kettle-drums of the prophets to be heard.*

*Hell and the Gardens of Paradise and the intermediate state I will bring to light before the eyes of the infidels.*

*I will disclose the body of water of Kawthar heaving with waves dashing water on the faces of the blessed ones, while its sound rings in their ears;*

*And those who are running in a state of thirst round Kawthar, I will name one by one and tell who they are:*

*Their shoulders are rubbing against my shoulders. Their cries are piercing my ears.*

*Before my eyes the people of Paradise, of free will, clasp each other to their bosoms,*

*Visiting one another's highest places of honor and snatching kisses from the lips of the houris.*

*This ear of mine has been deafened by the cries of 'Alas, Alas!' uttered by the vile wretches in Hell and by the screams of 'O sorrow!'*

*These are only hints. I would divulge the depth of my knowledge, but I fear to offend the Messenger of Allah."*

*He was speaking in this wise, intoxicated, and distraught manner: the Prophet twitched his collar,*

*And said," Beware! Draw in your reins, for your horse has become too hot. When the reflection of Allah not ashamed to speak the truth strikes the heart, shame vanishes.*

❁

Periodically, the ecstasy that filled the heart of the Prophet ﷺ was of such proportions that it was difficult for him to bear. In particular, when he was receiving revelation he felt an overwhelming burden and beads of sweat would form on his forehead. When the ecstasy would pass a certain limit, he used to say to his wife Aisha, may Allah be pleased with her:

– O Aisha! This spiritual state has overtaken me. Please come and converse with me.

Through conversation with her, he hoped to be relieved of the state and thus be freed to return to the human world.

On the other hand, when worldly concerns became overpowering, he would ask Bilal:

– O Bilal! Call the adhan!

Through the ebb and flow between these two poles, the spiritual balance necessary for the support of human life gradually took shape.

Otherwise, it would not have been possible for the Prophet to maintain a balanced form of communication with all members of the caravan that was to follow him.

❁

The one who was most drawn into the spiritual world during the sermons of the Prophet ﷺ was Abu Bakr, may Allah be pleased with him. They used to have private conversations, too. Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, conveyed an experience of their spiritual exchange as follows:

"I entered the presence of the Prophet ﷺ. He and Abu Bakr, may Allah be pleased with him, were involved in a conversation on the knowledge of *tawhid* (Oneness of Allah). I sat between them. I could not understand anything in their discussion. It was as if I did not even know Arabic. I asked Abu Bakr, may Allah be pleased with him:

– What is this conversation? Do you always talk like this with the Prophet ﷺ?

Abu Bakr ؓ replied:

– Yes. Sometimes, when we are alone, our discussions with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ are like this.

The Prophet ﷺ said, "We, the community of prophets, are commanded to descend to the level of ordinary people and speak in a way they can understand."

In another hadith, he is reported to have said, "Speak to people, not in the way you know, but in a way they can understand."

The sayings of the Prophet ﷺ describe the world as the "house of deception" (*dar al-ghurur*). Beyond being a world that deceives people, his sayings also describe this world as the "enchanting world" (*sakhkhara*) and the "merciless world" (*ghaddara*).

Usually we are unable to protect ourselves from being deceived by this false and transitory world in spite of the fact that we frequently witness its true nature, as but a shadow, in which the most certain fact is death. The power of this deception is of such proportion that this predicament remains unchanged even after witnessing the death of our relatives.

This is a consequence of the fact that this world is enchanting (*sakhkhara*) to us. Our deception is the outcome of its spell.

❁

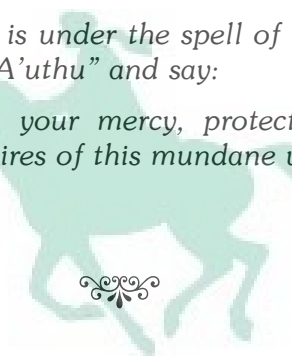
Rumi has explained the spell of the world as follows:

*It is a magician, who rolls a hundred meters of fabric in moonlight.*

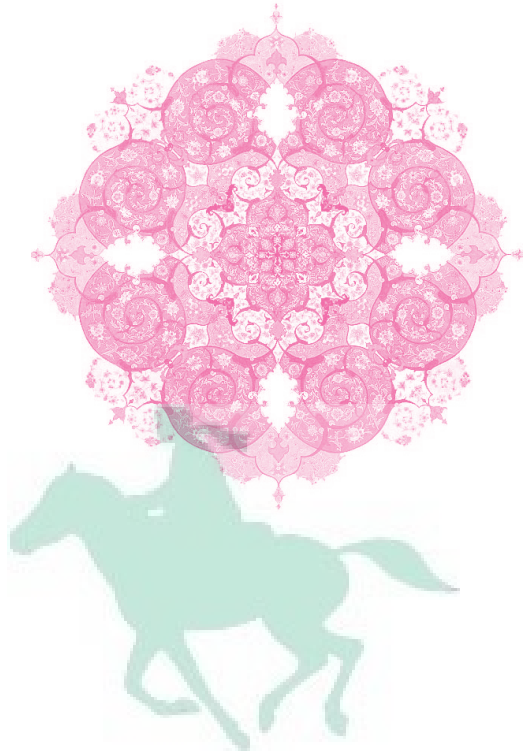
*When he takes from you your life, which is like silver money, then your life is gone, the fabric disappears, and your capital is finished.*

*O the one who is under the spell of this world! You should recite "Qul A'uthu" and say:*

*"O Lord! With your mercy, protect me from the magic and base desires of this mundane world."*



# The Charity of the Oppressor



*"Does a stone blossom even in the spring time?*
*Be as the soil so that roses and other flowers*
*emerge from you in many colors."*

Rumi

A sultan was going to the communal Friday (*Jum'a*) prayers. His soldiers were beating people on the street in order to clear the way for him. They were shouting at the people, kicking and hitting them. A poor man passing by, was also hit by the soldiers and wounded. He could not restrain himself and screamed behind the sultan:

– Look at your oppression! May Allah protect us from what you do behind closed doors, when this is what you do before our eyes. You are going to the mosque to pray and imagine you are performing a good deed! If this is your good deed, Allah only knows what your bad deeds are!

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* said, "This is what the charity of the oppressors is like. Imagine their misconduct…"

History presents us with instructive images recording the wounds, sufferings, and grievances caused by oppressors. Likewise, it also presents us with admirable pictures of mercy and altruism from the lives of just and pure hearted rulers. History thus functions to help us

remember and appreciate such worthy rules while directing us to do the same.

The Age of Happiness during which the Prophet ﷺ lived with his companions and the period of the rule of the Rightly Guided Caliphs following the prophetic period, has gifted human history with a matchless communal example of human harmony and happiness filled with countless examples of good conduct.

❁

When the Caliph Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, became the leader of the community, he said:

– O People! What would you do, if I abandoned what was right and just?

One man stood up and said:

– O Umar! If you go astray, we will correct you with our swords.

Umar, May Allah be pleased with him, was happy, and said:

– Thanks be to Allah, I have friends who will correct me if I go astray.

Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, had to endure financial difficulties while he was serving as the Caliph. He maintained an extremely humble life although the treasury of the state was overflowing with booties.

Some of the companions of the Prophet ﷺ suggested to Umar's daughter Hafsa that her father should receive a salary from the treasury of the state to meet his material needs. When Hafsa, may Allah be pleased with her, carried this message to her father, Umar said:

– O my daughter! You were a wife of the Prophet ﷺ. Tell me about the eating and drinking of the Prophet?

Hafsa replied:

– It was just the sufficient amount.

Umar, May Allah be pleased with him, continued:

– My two friends (Prophet Muhammad and Abu Bakr) and I are like three travelers on the same path. One of us (the Prophet) has reached his destination. The second one followed his path and he has joined him. I am the third one. I want to reach them. If I carry a heavy burden, I may not be able to reach them.

He was tempted neither by the growing wealth in the treasury of the state nor by the vast lands conquered by his armies. He did not spend more than the minimum for his survival. He never permitted himself to be degraded by the pursuit of mundane gains and when the divinely appointed time came for his death, he had a loan to pay.

❁

The era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs is full of illustrations like this. This early period was followed first by the historical period of the *Umayyads* and later by the time of the Abbasids. Historically, these two periods were colored by both exemplary and lamentable events. Among them was the rule of Umar ibn Abdulaziz, who was known for his justice and mercy. Sadly these two periods were also known for rulers of a kind who were responsible first for the death of Husayn, may Allah be pleased with him, the grandson of the Prophet ﷺ and later for the death of the great scholar Abu Hanifa who was beaten to death because he refused to serve as an instrument in providing justification for unjust rule.

Sadi in his book *Ghulistan* has remarked as follows:

An oppressive ruler once asked a friend of Allah:

– For me, which worship is superior?

The friend of Allah replied:

– It is your sleep. Because when you sleep, you cannot hurt any one.

Humility is desirable and consequently is a quality Allah wants to see in his servants. However, it must be noted that this is not because humility makes a person friendlier and or because it helps him attain a higher social status, but because it brings the blessings of Allah.

Rumi said, "Does a stone blossom even in the spring time? Be as the soil so that roses and other flowers emerge from you in many colors."

In other words, what benefits from the spring is only the soil. Consequently, many kinds of flowers burst forth in bloom. In contrast, a stone, which also sees the spring, never bears fruit from it.

Those whose heart is like a stone bear great resemblance to the stones of the natural world. Even an April rain is of no benefit to them at all, for those who lack the power to control their egos (nafs) their worship fails to flower and instead reflects their ugly, base desires. These mundane desires thus become their Ka'aba.

❁

Great leaders have always been educated by great scholars who have bestowed in them a deep respect for spirituality ingrained in which is an abiding sense of responsibility and mercy for their communities. These

qualities have ensured such leaders great places in world history.

For instance, Ertugrul Ghazi chose as his guide the great Sheikh Edebali. He also sent his son, Osman, to him for training. Ertugrul Ghazi's advice to his son, Osman, included the following universally useful admonitions:

*"O my son, listen carefully!*

*You may mistreat me, but never mistreat your teacher Sheikh Edebali.*

*He is the spiritual sun of our community. He is a scale that never errs.*

*Even if you rebel against me, do not rebel against him!*

*If you rebel against me, my heart will be broken and I will be deeply upset. But if you rebel against him, my eyes will not be able to rest on you; for even if they capture your visage, in your unsightliness they will not see you.*

*The benefit of our words is not for Sheikh Edebali, but for you.*

*Consider these words as my will to you."*

❁

Sheikh Edebali accepted Osman, who was a very dynamic young man, as a student and helped him gain the taste of knowing Allah (*marifatullah*). Through their association, the young Osman cultivated such mature moral qualities as altruism and modesty, thus helping to prepare him to become the founder of a world state.

From this perspective, the actual founder of the Ottoman state is Sheikh Edebali. Since the other tribes did

not have someone like Sheikh Edebali, they were unable to develop. Yet, the Ottomans expanded quickly to become a state and then to become a world empire controlling the majority of the known lands at that time. Worldwide they represented Islam for six centuries and for the duration of this time were active in the distribution of justice.

Sheikh Edebali gave to Osman Ghazi, the founder of the Ottoman state, and by logical extension to all future leaders the following advice:

*"O my son!*

*You are the ruler! We are the subjects! Anger is ours; patience is yours… Our hearts will be broken, and you will repair them but not vice versa… Accusation belongs to us; endurance belongs to you… Impotence and errors are ours; tolerance is yours… Disharmony, conflict, disagreement, and misunderstanding are ours; justice is yours… A negative approach, bad words, and unjust interpretation are ours; forgiveness is yours…*

*O my son!*

*From now on, division is ours, reuniting is yours… Laziness is ours, motivating, warning and reforming are yours…*

*O my son!*

*Your burden is heavy; your work is difficult; and your power is tied to you only with a single thread of hair… May Allah be your helper and bless your state. May He make you beneficial in the path of Allah. May He make your light bright. May He let your light reach remote lands. May He give you power to easily shoulder your burden; may He give you reason and heart to protect you from going astray from the right path.*

*We should work for the realization of what Allah has promised us. You and your friends should clear the path with your swords; while dervishes like us clear it with ideas, advice, and prayers. We should clear the obstacles on the path to help people see the truth.*

*Patience is extremely important. A ruler must know how to be patient. A flower does not bloom before the due time. An unripe fruit cannot be eaten; even if it is eaten, it cannot be swallowed. A sword without knowledge is like an unripe fruit.*

*Let your people live with their knowledge. Do not turn your back to knowledge. Always feel the importance of its existence. What preserves both the ruler and the subjects is knowledge.*

*The greatest triumph is to know the ego (nafs). The enemy is the person himself. The friend is the very person who knows his ego.*

*The country is not the common property of the ruler, his sons, and brothers. The country belongs only to the ruler. After he dies, the rule belongs to the one who replaces him. Our erroneous ancestors made the mistake of dividing their land in their lifetime to their sons and brothers. Consequently, they could not survive; nor could they let others survive.*

*When one sits, he cannot easily move. Without motion, he becomes sluggish. When he is sluggish, he begins idle talk that eventually turns into gossip. When gossip begins, there is no salvation… A friend becomes an enemy; and an enemy becomes a dragon.*

*Blood must not be shed in vain. It needs a path and direction… because blood is not used to water the land.*

*The power of a person vanishes one day but his knowledge survives. The light of knowledge can penetrate even closed eyes and can bestow upon them a clear view.*

*When a horse dies, its saddle remains; when a person dies, the fruits of his work remain. Do not cry for those who depart from this world, but cry rather for those who depart from it without leaving anything behind them. When one departs, his legacy should be maintained from the point where he left.*

*I do not like war. I despise shedding blood. Yet I also know that the sword must inevitably be waved. But the purpose in waving it must be to preserve life rather than to kill. In particular, it is a crime if one uses a sword against another person. The ruler is not above the country; a war must not exist just for the sake of the ruler.*

*We have no right to rest because time is not a luxury. Our time is limited…*

*The feeling of loneliness is for cowards… If a farmer knows the time to sow the seed, he does not need to ask anyone else even if he is alone… It is sufficient for him to know that the soil is ready…*

*Love should be the essence of the cause. Love is in silence. Shouting makes love impossible. Being seen makes love impossible.*

*Those who do not know their past will not be able to discover their future. Osman! Learn your history well so that you step forward securely. Do not forget your origin so that you can remember your destination…*

With these values, Sheikh Edebali molded Osman's character. He was obliged to do so because Osman Bey was in great need and under great strain. Was he to keep together the Turkish tribes who joined him by maintaining a balance between them? Was he to watch out for the Germiyans or for the Mongolians or would his cause be best served by fighting Byzantium? In all these crucial issues and in many others, Sheikh Edebali enlightened Osman's path, helping him and leading him towards solutions.

Historically, in the Ottoman State great importance was invested in the upbringing of princes. Their education and wider training began at a very young age under the tutelage of the highest authorities of their time. In particular, deep importance was attached to their spiritual and moral development. One of the most important reasons for this was that it was understood that the survival of a state depended on the implementation of just rule. Consequently, it was readily understood that since the rule of the Ottoman State was going to be entrusted to them in the future, their moral integrity would be one of the best ways of guaranteeing the future stability and vitality of the community. Even after a prince had become a sultan, these principles continued to be applied with the teachers continuing to offer guidance including even admonitions with warnings. For instance, Aziz Mahmud Hudayi wrote several letters to Murad III to warn and guide him. These letters occasionally were even of a character that utilized harsh language.

The following examples illustrate for us how sultans were counseled with warnings. For example, when the sultan would descend the palace stairs a chamberlain would shout: "Live long my sultan! May he be blessed with good fortune"!

Alternatively, in a different instance when a sultan would enter a mosque, he would pass through crowds of people who had formed two lines on each side of the way he would traverse. These crowds would inevitably honor him with great ovations. With the purpose of protecting the sultan from being inflated by his ego, a team of guards used to remind him in a low voice: "Refrain from pride, O my sultan! Allah is greater than you"!

The history of the Ottoman state shone brightly for the duration of time scholars such as Sheikh Edebali continued to be instrumental in molding the character of the sultans side by side with shaping the rule of the nation. Through both their concrete advice and their general inspiration, they were immensely influential figures in the Ottoman community.

Teachers from later generations, who fulfilled the role Sheikh Edebali performed for Osman, include the following examples: Emir Sultan guided Yildrim, Haji Bayram Veli guided Murad II, Akshemseddin guided Fatih Sultan Mehmet, Mehdi Pasha guided Bayazid II, Ibn Kemal Pasha guided Yavuz Selim, Merkez Efendi and Sunbul Efendi guided Kanuni, Aziz Mahmud Hudai guided Murad III, Ahmed I and Murat IV.

❁

The royal historian of the time recorded the following event surrounding Yavuz Selim: When Yavuz entered Egypt as a conqueror people gathered in the streets to see the Sultan. Yavuz, however, was not walking in front but was rather further to the rear humbly among his soldiers. His appearance and dress were indistinguishable from the demeanour of those around him. On a different occasion, this time on the way back from Egypt, as he passed by

Damascus he attended the Jum'a prayers. The imam mentioned the name of the new Caliph as follows:

– The ruler of the two sacred sanctuaries (*Hakim al-Haramayn al-Sharifain*)."

When he heard that he replied with tears in his eyes:

– No! No! On the contrary, I am the servant of the two holy sanctuaries. (*Khadim al-Haramayn al-Sharifain*).

Later, as they approached Istanbul one morning, he realized that if he entered the city in daytime the population would rise to applause and that they would make a great celebration. He instructed his assistant Hasan Can as follows:

– Let us wait until it gets dark and people return to their homes and sleep. When the streets are empty, I will enter Istanbul so that the applause of the mortal being will not defeat me…"

✺

In the course of his life, we observe that Yavuz Selim acted like a lion in the Sinai desert, like a humble and grateful believer when entering Cairo and like a soul searching Sufi with a deep inner life on his approach to Istanbul.

He recited the following couplet to Hasan Can:

*Becoming the sultan of the world is just an idle fight,*

*Superior to even this is becoming a slave of a saint.*

✺

The same assistant, Hasan Can, describes Yavuz Selim's last breath as follows:

He suffered from anthrax on his back that expanded quickly and perforated his body. Through the hole, we could see his liver. He was in great pain. I drew close to him and said:

– O my sultan! I think the time of reunion with Allah has arrived.

He turned towards me, looked at my face with amazement, and said:

– Hasan! Hasan! Who do you think I have been together with until now? Please read for me the Surah Yasin from the Holy Qur'an…

He gave his last breath while Surah Yasin was being recited to him.

The great victories recorded during his reign of nine years, and the subsequent praise of mortals could neither spoil nor defeat him. He lived with the sole objective of being a servant to his Lord.

O Lord! Lead us to be and keep us as your servants. This is the real kingship.

Amen!

# From Captivity to Freedom

*The yearning of lovers for each other is a blessed act.*
*In particular, if the one who yearns is Layla,*
*and the one who is yearned for is Majnun.*

Rumi

A merchant owned a beautiful parrot that he dearly adored and kept in a cage. One day, the merchant decided to travel to India on a business trip. Since he was a kind man, he asked his servants if they wanted anything from India. Everyone requested something and in the meantime, he asked his beloved parrot:

– Should I bring something for you from India?

The parrot replied:

– Just deliver my greetings to them and mention my condition!

By doing so, the captive parrot wanted to convey the following message to the parrots of India: "This parrot who admires you has been captured in a trap. He is now imprisoned in a cage for the entirety of his life. In sending greetings to you, he is requesting your guidance, assistance, and help. Is it fair for him to be in a cage while you are freely enjoying yourselves among beautiful flowers in green forests? He is in a prison while you are in a rose garden. Can this be loyalty or friendship? Is it acceptable for him to

suffer alone in a remote country and for him to eventually die alone here? O the master parrots! Please do not forget this miserable one while you enjoy yourself each morning in green pastures. The yearning of friends for friends is a blessed act; it is a blessing of multiple worth. This is true in particular, if the one who yearns is Layla, and the one who is yearned for is Majnun[8]. O all parrots who live and fly as a community! While you fly freely, my heart bleeds in a cage! If you want to bring happiness to me, drink a few more sips on my behalf from the eternal life-giving waters and sprinkle some drops to earth in memory of your helpless brother!"

The merchant accepted the parrot's request. When he reached India, he saw some parrots flying in the branches of trees. He screamed towards them and conveyed the greetings of his parrot.

The meaning that was carried in this greeting, that is the cries and tears of the caged parrot, touched the hearts of the parrots in India to such an extent that one of them trembled, fell to the ground, lost its breath, and suddenly died.

The merchant was amazed by what he had witnessed. He resented that he had conveyed the greetings of his parrot to them. He said to himself, "I have caused the death of a living being; I have sinned. Probably, this parrot was a distant relative of my parrot. Why did I do this? Why did I convey this message and harm this innocent bird with my words?"

8. Layla and Majnun are the heroes of a love story that has been used by Sufi masters to symbolically explain divine live.

When the merchant returned home, he told his parrot with great amazement what had happened in India. He went on to add:

– O my parrot! I still resent what I said and even bite my hands and fingers in anguish. But what use is there in this remorse after having committed the offense...

The captive parrot in the course of carefully listening to his owner's news, just as had happened to the parrot in India, trembled, and fell down motionless to the bottom of his cage. The merchant, when he witnessed this, took off his hat and threw it to the floor. He became extremely agitated and began screaming:

– O my beautiful parrot! O my bird blessed with such a beautiful voice! What has happened? Why have you become so? O my comrade! If King Sulaiman had a bird like you, he would not have spared a moment for other birds!

The merchant cried because he realized that his parrot was his source of joy. He used to talk to it and share with it his deepest secrets. As he was weeping, he said to himself:

– Allah is the one who gives, and Allah is the one who takes away.

His heart was on fire because of having been separated from the parrot. He was helplessly searching for a solution just like the one who has been drawn to the bottom of the sea, but refuses to release his hold on the seaweed... He was blaming his tongue:

– O my tongue! You have caused two deaths! You have greatly harmed me. What can rightfully be said to you? O my tongue! You are both a source of destruction and a source of fruit. Until what time will you continue setting fire

to the harvest? O my tongue! My heart has been rent asunder by you. Although it obeys you in all circumstances, it suffers from you too. O tongue! Sometimes you are an endless source of treasure like the tongue of a saint, but sometimes you are a cause of chronic pain and suffering like the poisonous tongue of corruption! O merciless! You are enough to bring a snake out of its den and to make a man leave his religion! Are you not going to show me mercy, or have you decided to direct your arrow towards me and to kill me too?

Eventually, after a long and deep lament, the merchant took the dead body of the parrot out of the cage and began to think about a place to inter it.

At this instant, the parrot, which had been acting as if it had died, suddenly showed signs of life. It flew away and lit on the branch of a tree.

The merchant was shocked and deeply puzzled by what he observed. Perplexed, he questioned the parrot:

– O my bird! For the sake of Allah, explain your true circumstance to me. What have you learned from the parrot in India that has inspired you to vex my heart? What is the secret behind your course of action? Explain it to me so that I can also benefit from these revelations. Please do not deprive me of this.

The parrot replied:

– The parrot whose news you conveyed to me guided me by sending me a message through its actions. It advised me and its advice was like a spring of life-giving water to my heart burning with lament. Its message to me said: "Your beautiful voice is the cause of your imprisonment. O the one who sings and brings happiness to the young and

to the old! O the one who brings ecstasy to both scholars and uneducated people alike! O the one who entertains everyone with his songs of joy! Pause, concentrate, and contemplate your situation. Cease this chanting! Die like me, and be saved from captivity". I immediately followed his advice, killed myself and consequently gained salvation.

The parrot went on to say:

– O my lord! I have been saved from captivity and will now return to my homeland. If you choose the same path I have chosen, you too will be freed from the cage of your body, gain your freedom, and return to your homeland, the paradise from which your father Adam came. You will break free from this body composed but of ash, and will rise to the Heavens!

The merchant was spiritually stirred by his inspired words. He said to himself, "This guidance suffices for me! From this moment forward, I too will follow the path of my parrot because I have realized that on its path is a spring of life-giving water that imparts eternal life and leads one to enlightenment and the discovery of the ultimate truth of his nature.

❁

The parrot in the cage that has been sited in this story symbolizes the soul that is being held captive both by the body and by the ego. The parrots in India symbolize the friends of Allah who have abandoned this transient world and its pleasures and have been liberated from slavery to this material world.

The instruction offered by the parrots in India to the parrot in the cage should be understood as follows: "Die

before death." It is an order of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ which should be pursued because true; abiding salvation is only possible this way. Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* has made the following statement:

*"Die so that you can wake up in the morning of truth!"*

It is as if the parrot in India remarked to the parrot in the cage:

- Die! In other words, free yourself from attachment to your mundane desires before the moment of your physical death arrives. Know how to die through the application of your will, through the curbing of your desires. As a soul, strive for the life of the Real as you fly to new horizons.

Is not worldly life but a physical imprisonment for the one who remains unaware of his origin, unaware of his true nature and unaware of the treasure hidden within him? The real life begins only after the carnal desires of the body have been reined in and firmly brought under control. This implies nothing but the death of the ego and leads to the discovery of the true meaning of existence.

Therefore, Rumi states as follows:

*The story of the parrot of life resembles the story of the merchant's parrot.*

*O heedless one! Die just like this bird and be saved! If you act like a kernel of wheat, the birds will discover you and will eat you. If you become like a rose, children will pluck you like a beautiful blossom.*

*Cover up your wheat and hide yourself in remote places! Hide your rose so that you resemble inconsequential grass growing at the bottom of a wall.*

*That is, avoid fame and avoid showing off or proving yourself. Preserve your modesty and covet nothingness. This way you will be protected both from evil eyes and from intrusions on your freedom.*

*The one who displays his beauty at the marketplace invites trouble. This attitude draws the attention of evil eyes. Both friends and enemies will work for his destruction, though through different means. The former will employ excessive praise; the latter will endeavor through jealousy. The only way to overcome both of these dangers is through freedom from the chain of existence.*

In order to be saved from the chains of this worldly life, one has to die, or look as if he is dead; that is, he should submit himself voluntarily to the will of Allah. Therefore, Junayd al-Baghdadi defined the Sufi path as follows: "Allah kills you within you and revives you within Himself. This is *tasawwuf*.

When the human servant is cleansed of his base worldliness and is absorbed in the divine light, his troubles are overcome but not *vice versa*. For instance, the flood that killed the enemies of Allah, befriended Musa عليه السلام and Nuh عليه السلام and similarly the fire designed to consume Ibrahim عليه السلام instead became a rose garden for him. These incidents are not accidents but rather are Allah's miracles and demonstrate the support and generosity of Allah to his pure hearted servants. This is but the beginning since these stories are rich with other lessons and wisdom too.

On the other hand, these stories demonstrate the possibility of divine support coming to those who are in need of it or who deserve it. What a servant of Allah must

do is to purify his heart of his ego. This banishes the devil from his heart as it detaches his heart from anything other than Allah. With this, the believer can turn to Him and fill his heart with His remembrance.

Yet it should also be kept in mind that remembrance of Allah is not only through the repetition of His names, but also through true knowledge of Allah which makes His manifestations pervade one's entire existence.

Continuous remembrance of Allah elevates one to such a degree that one realizes that the truth of remembrance is the sole true function of the heart and the sole purpose for which it was ultimately created. The heart becomes the mirror of remembrance of Allah.

The truth of remembrance is beyond letters, words, and sounds. This is because the essence or the core of the heart is divine. It is a spiritual entity that cannot be reduced to only material qualities. These two, the heart and the activity of remembrance, thus become abstracted from the material base, unite, and become one. At this point remembrance contains the heart like a cover and protects it from all else other than Allah. The heart thus attains to nothingness during the remembrance of Allah. Everything else disappears except Allah, the one who is remembered. This is the state of *fana*. It is a state where all that is transient is cleared away between Allah and the one remembering Him and the Eternal alone remains. It is the fulfillment of the heart and the union of the lover with the Beloved.

It is stated in the Qur'an that: **"Those who believe, and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of Allah: for without doubt in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction"** (Ra'd 13: 28)**.** Another verse stresses the

same point: **"For, believers are those who, when Allah is mentioned, feel a tremor in their hearts, and when they hear his revelations rehearsed, find their faith strengthened, and put (all) their trust in their Lord"** (Anfal, 8: 2)**.** The following verse illuminates the condition of the friends of Allah in the Hereafter: **"Behold! Verily on the friends of Allah, there is no fear, nor shall they grieve"** (Yunus 10: 62)**.**

❁

The bird in the cage reached ultimate freedom through understanding the message in the symbols and applying them.

In reality, the soul is imprisoned in the cage of the body. Thousands of birds, not just one, enter and exit this cage. The birds that enter are passions, carnal desires and false concerns. These are the desires that fawn and flatter one parasitically for their own interests. Each one of these groups reveal to us numerous things.

Some say:

– I am your true friend!

Others say:

– No, I am your only friend and comrade!

While others flatteringly claim:

– Both worlds have been created for you. We are but servants at your door!

Some hypocritically remark after everything you mention:

– You are correct!

These examples are countless. But unfortunately, human beings with immature souls, who are in love with their physical bodies that serve as their cages, are fooled by these whispers. They attribute great importance to themselves. These miserable individuals are unaware that these are the dangerous and the complicated tricks of Satan. Flattering remarks that inflate our egos are like a most enjoyable music to him. However, they are the food of the Devil and turn eventually into fire. Even though, they appear to be a source of joy, in the end, they become a destructive fire. Those who are unable to decipher the nature of this destructive fire in this world will understand the true nature of it in the middle of flames in the Hereafter. The moment of their death will be too late and their last cries of true understanding will serve as but an indication of the coming of their end.

The Caliph Ali has said, "Two things destroy a person: following the desires of the ego and enjoying praise and flattery of himself."

Allah will grant the eternal happiness of the next world only to those who do not act arrogantly, who do not cause corruption, and who instead nurture the love of Allah in their hearts. Those who lose touch with the spiritually blessed quality of humility and in its place adopt evil qualities will not be saved from becoming like Pharaohs. Therefore, it is necessary for us to cultivate humility for avoiding such an ignominious end.

The blessings of humility are many in kind. A humble person is generous. A generous person is merciful. A merciful person is full of joy borne of service to other

creatures since it brings the blessings of Allah. Yet a person who has distanced himself from humility is equally distant from these admirable qualities.

Understanding grows in a person by virtue of humility and this helps him easily distinguish his foes from his friends. Out of humility, he might one day grow to understand that through it he spiritually might lose his ego based authority, leadership, and status; and at that instant the flatterers will suddenly become his enemies. They will dislike him and spontaneously run from him as one runs away from a lion.

Consequently, a servant of Allah should strive to be near the friends of Allah who are but mirrors of the heart and will reflect to him his true nature. Through their guidance, one should struggle to deeply see into himself and the tricks of his ego. He should observe the manners of the friends of Allah through the eye of his heart as he makes every effort to gain wisdom from them while at the same time distancing himself from the whispers of his ego and refraining from mistakes.

He should know that the word and the manners of the friends of Allah are full of wisdom. They convey secrets through symbols and signs because they do not like to embarrass those who are not ready for learning, while at the same time they refrain from depriving the teaching from those who are already in a state of readiness. Only, the ones with pure hearts can comprehend such words. Those who are not prepared hear but the words alone.

Abu Hurayra, may Allah bless him, said that: "I took two types of knowledge from the Prophet ﷺ. I spread one type and kept the other type. If I spread the latter as well,

the meaning would be too much to carry and I would lose my mind."

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in his presence was a manifestation of the integration of all prophetic attributes. The good characteristics of each of the one hundred and twenty four thousand prophets that came to this world since the time of Adam were all reflected in his personality. The prophets and friends of Allah are unique in the perfection attributes that shine through their characters. The Prophet Muhammad *sallallahu alaihi wa salla* was unique among these unique beings in that his character was a final integral expression, a final statement and display of all the positive attributes that were ever revealed in the lives of the prophets and friends of Allah that preceded him. Thus, his character carried the stamp of prophetic perfection.

In the course of history, each prophet's personality was the expression of a particular quality that especially shone through his being. To better understand this, some examples are in order:

The Prophet Ibrahim عليه السلام was named *Khalilullah* or the intimate friend of Allah who has room in his heart only for the love of Allah and nothing else. The Prophet Musa عليه السلام was named *Kalimullah* or the one who conversed with Allah. The Prophet Isa عليه السلام was called *Ruhullah* because of the purity of his soul and the perfection of his morality.

Likewise, the friends of Allah have also been known for particular spiritual qualities. Thus, they are reflections respectively of different divine attributes. For instance, Abdulqadir al-Gilani represents an outstanding level in the power to influence people; Muhyiddin Ibn al-'Arabi

represents an extraordinary level in his spiritual knowledge and the unveiling of the heart's eye while Rumi represents a remarkable level in the degree of the burning of his love and ecstasy and his expression of unity.

❁

Rumi explained his spiritual circumstance as follows:

*I have expressed these secrets in a covered and brief way. I have not explained them openly. This is because if I had done so both the tongue of the one who explained in detail and the intelligence of the listener would have been burned.*

In another couplet he says:

*My couplet is not a simple couplet; it is a sea of meaning. My jokes are not simple jokes, but rather they are lessons. My stories are not a simple collection of ordinary words; they are teachings. All of them aim to help the audience grasp the secrets.*

The *Mathnawi* is a book composed for spiritual education and enlightenment. Another characteristic of the *Mathnawi* is that since the levels of understanding and spiritual potentials of the readers vary, it has adopted a literary style that has made use of jokes and simple stories. In other words, in stories that on the surface appear very simple, he has explained deep secrets of the divine order using a veiled style.

Rumi's couplets, describing his departure from this world, clearly illustrate this quality. He referred to his death as "*shabi arus,*" that is, the night of the wedding. In his choice of this ordinary expression, he has articulated his spiritual union with Absolute Beauty. He said:

*"Let those who love me from their hearts entertain and share my happiness..."*

In a like manner, he said:

*When I die and I am put in a shroud, do not scream "separation!", "separation!". When they put me in my grave, do not cry "farewell!", "farewell!". For me, death is not a matter to complain about, but rather it is an occasion for joy.*

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* was asked:

– What is this world?

He replied:

– The prison of souls.

The poet Yunus Emre, who was blessed with a very sensitive heart, described his feelings of separation in this world in the form of a conversation with a nightingale:

*Are you a stranger here,*
*Why do you cry, O nightingale?*
*Are you exhausted, are you lost,*
*Why do you cry, O nightingale?*

*Have you passed over the mountain tops covered in snow?*

*Have you passed deep rivers?*
*Are you separated from your home?*
*Why do you cry, O nightingale?*

In another poem Rumi says:

*I am in the prison of this world because I have been assigned the task of guiding lost souls. Otherwise, what is my being and what is the purpose of my*

*imprisonment? Why should I be imprisoned? I have not stolen anyone's property?*

In the world, each step brings us closer to our destination. Likewise, each breath brings us closer to the time of our departure from this world. From another perspective, the original home of the soul is the world of souls. Each breath brings the soul closer to its origin. As the evaporation of the pool's water escapes being noticed, so too our lives evaporate in a chain of breaths that are silently taken and silently given.

All physical bodies decay in the soil regardless of whether they are human or animal because the origin of each is ash. They all disappear and equally become dust. Each material being thus returns to its origin. So too will each spiritual being. Some beings will go to Paradise because it is in keeping with their nature, while some will go to the Hellfire because their souls deserve it.

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* explained the three stages of his life as follows:

*"I was immature, I became cooked and I was burned".*

The burning of the body symbolically indicates nourishment of the soul with spiritual food and thus detachment from the mundane.

Similarly, when the moth is drawn to the light it loses its own will, eventually enters the light, and is burned. Rumi illustrates this as follows: "Without the burning of your body, it is impossible to attain to the pleasures of divine love."

Hallaj al-Mansur also longed for death due to the spiritual shocks he went through. He said: "My life is from my death."

Rumi warns us against the traps of our egos as follows:

*Do no eat ash! Do not buy ash! Do not look for ash! For, the face of the one who eats ash becomes pale.*

*For the purpose of perfecting the talents of your heart, eat heart! In other words, feed your heart with the descending divine knowledge so that you stay young and your face remains like a flower due to the divine manifestations it imbues.*

❁

The Babylon king Nimrod had prophet Ibrahim ﷺ thrown into fire. Nevertheless, Allah gave the following command to the fire:

***"O Fire! Become cool and peaceful for Ibrahim!"*** (Anbiya, 69).

The fire did not burn him. Instead, his environs became a rose garden. If Nimrod and his followers had entered that fire, they would have all been burned in it because they did not possess the qualities Ibrahim ﷺ possessed. Instead, they carried the qualities of Nimrod.

❁

When the two armies met in the battle of Badr, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ threw to the enemy side a handful of dust from the ground. The dust struck their eyes; they had to rub their eyes. It was the beginning of their defeat. This was explained in the following verse:

***"When you threw it, you were not the one who actually threw it, but Allah is the one who actually threw it"*** (Anfal, 17)**.**

At that moment, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ became a means for an action brought about by Allah. In a similar fashion, the friends of Allah also become vehicles for divine actions. Occasionally, the power of Allah manifests through them. They become mirrors of the Absolute Actor or the divine Will. Their actions bear the stamp of Allah.

It is necessary for those who carry in their heart the qualities of Nimrod to undergo training by an authorized master if they want to save themselves from the trap of Satan. Their circumstance is the same as the captive bird in the cage who saved its life by strictly following the instructions symbolically received from the birds in India. He gained his ultimate freedom. Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* said:

*Happy is the person who attains death, before he physically dies: his soul attains to the smell of the garden of truth.*

In a divine hadith, Allah says:

*I cause the death of a person I love. For whomever I cause his death, I pay for his blood money. For whomever I pay the blood money, I myself become the blood money.*

Rumi said:

*"My blood money is seeing the Lord Most High in Paradise."*

He continued his words with the prayer below:

*O the One who is the King of the entirety of existence, but without throne and crown! Other than you, who can free us, the helpless, from the handcuffs clutched by our egos?*

*Save us from the hands of the evil ego because its knife has penetrated to our bones.*

*O Allah! Take hold of our hands and purchase us! Elevate the curtain of heedlessness from our hearts! But do not tear the curtain of nothingness and protect us from shame.*

Amen!

# The Wisdom Behind the Existence of the Ego

*Had I but briefly described your inner world,*
*You would have been terrified;*
*Fear might very well have killed you;*
*You would have been crushed like a mouse before a cat.*

Rumi

The honor that fills our heart in triumph is borne of the sense of accomplishment we feel for having endured the trials and tribulations one must taste in the struggle to succeed.

Prophet Adam ﷺ unknowingly committed an error that resulted in his exile to earth from paradise. The ultimate reason for this event is to offer the descendants of Adam ﷺ during the course of their life on earth, the opportunity to regain their lost honor of having had the ***"best stature"*** (Tin, 95/4). This supreme distinction is bestowed only upon those human beings who pass the tests conferred upon them by their Creator during this earthly life and in so doing earn their right to return to their primordial paradisiacal home. Allah, with the intention of increasing this honor, has furthermore equipped all human beings with an ego or *nafs* that functions as an obstacle on the straight path of return. The process of prevailing over the *nafs* functions to increase the value of the achieved aim as in all other cases when one triumphs over impediments on the path to victory. Beyond this, Allah has also bestowed

upon man the necessary means for attaining to this aim. In this regard, of principle importance are the prophets He has sent and the chains of saints and scholars following them who will continue to offer guidance to man until the end of the world.

❁

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* symbolically explained the wisdom behind the existence of the ego in the following story.

*An amir (ruler) was riding along at the very moment a snake was going into the mouth of a sleeping man.*

*The amir observed this and in spite of hurrying to scare the snake away, he had no chance to do so.*

*Since his Creator had endowed him with an abundant supply of intelligence, he struck the sleeping man several powerful blows with a mace.*

*The strokes of the hard mace drove the man to quickly flee from the amir to a point beneath a tree.*

*Beneath the tree there were many rotten apples that had fallen from it and the amir said, "Eat of these, O you in the grip of pain!"*

*He gave the man so many apples to eat that they were falling out of his mouth.*

*He was crying, "O amir, I beseech you, why have you set upon me? What have I done to deserve this treatment?*

*If you have an inveterate and mortal feud with me, strike me with your sword and shed my blood at once.*

*Ill omened was the hour I fell into your gaze: oh, happy would be the one who was never blessed with your visage!*

*Untarnished by guilt or sin, without having done anything great or small– in all sincerity even the heretics permit no oppression such as this.*

*Blood gushes from my mouth together with my words. I entreat Thee O Allah, grant him the retribution which he truly deserves!"*

*Every instant he continued to utter a new curse, while the amir kept beating him and saying, "Run on this plain."*

*The blows of the mace and the rider were as swift as the wind! He therefore went on running between periodic bouts of falling on his face.*

*Full-fed and deeply fatigued: his feet and face became covered with a hundred thousand wounds.*

*Till nightfall the amir drove him to and fro, until vomiting caused by bile finally overtook him.*

*All the things, both good and bad, came up from within him: the snake shot forth from him along with all that he had eaten.*

*When he saw the snake outside of him, he fell on his knees before that beneficent man.*

*No sooner had he seen the horror of that big, black, ugly, snake, than the grief departed from him.*

*"Truly," said he, "you are the Jibril of divine mercy, or you are Allah, for you are the lord of bounty.*

*Oh, blessed is the hour that you first saw me: I was dead and you have given me new life.*

*You were seeking me as a mother searches for her children; I was fleeing from you as if an ass.*

*The ass flees from his master out of asininity, while his owner runs after him as a consequence of good nature.*

*He seeks him, not on account of profit or loss, but rather that a wolf or another wild beast might not tear him apart.*

*Oh, happy is he that espies your face or suddenly lights upon your abode.*

*O you whom pure spirit has praised, how many foolish and idle words have I uttered to you!*

*O lord and emperor and amir, I spoke not, my folly spoke: do not punish me for this offense.*

*If I had only known your title, o master, how could I have spoken such foolish words?*

*I should have praised you, O man of virtuous qualities, if you had but given me a single hint as to the actual circumstance.*

*But you, maintaining silence, were perturbed and silently continued to beat me on the head.*

*My head became dizzy; the wits flew out of my head– especially as this head has but little brain.*

*Pardon me, O man of beneficent countenance and benevolent behavior: let pass that which I have exclaimed in a state of frenzy."*

*The amir answered, "If I had uttered a hint of it, your gall would instantly have turned to water.*

*Had I described to you the qualities of the snake, in terror you would have given up the ghost.*

*If I had told you about the snake, neither would you have been able to eat, nor would you have been capable of vomiting or cared to do so.*

*I heard your abuse and went on with my work; I kept praying beneath my breath, 'O Lord, make it easy!'*

*Neither was I able to speak of the cause, nor did I have permission to abandon you.*

*Borne of the grief in my heart I was continually praying, 'Oh Lord, guide my people; verily they know not.'"*

*The man that had been delivered from woe fell on his knees and said, "O (you who are) my bliss, O my fortune and treasure,*

*You will gain great rewards from Allah, O noble one; this weakling has not the power to thank you.*

*Allah will say thanks to you, O leader; I have neither the lips nor the chin nor the voice for that."*

*It is in this fashion that we find the enmity of the wise: their poison brings gladness to the soul,*

*While the friendship of the fool brings with it woe and perdition: hear this tale as a parable.*

❁

The Prophet ﷺ said:

*"... If I should tell aright the description of the enemy which is in your souls, the gall bladders even of*

*courageous men would burst: he (such a one) would neither go his way nor care for any work.*

*Neither would there remain in his heart endurance in supplication, nor in his body sufficient strength for fasting and ritual prayer.*

*He would become good for nothing like a mouse before a cat; he would be distraught as a lamb before a wolf.*

*No power to plan or power to move would remain in him: it is for this reason that I tend you without speaking."*

The Prophet ﷺ adopted this method. For the purpose of protecting the interests of those around them, the saints have chosen silence, too. Furthermore, they never reveal what is in the heart of those surrounding them. Instead, they veil their shortcomings. They educate by virtue of exemplary actions and behaviors instead of on the basis of words. Those under divine guidance have the ability to influence people even with hearts like iron so long as such hardened people retain the ability to be influenced in the same way Prophet David was able to soften iron.

Abu Darda, may Allah be pleased with him, was serving as the judge of Damascus. One day, he witnessed some people cursing a person who had committed a sin. He asked them:

– What would you do if you saw a man who had fallen in a well?

They said:

– We would use a rope to save him from the well.

Abu Darda said to them:

– Then why do you not show mercy on this person who has fallen into a well of sins? Why do you not prepare a rope of glad tidings for him and save him from his misfortune?

One asked:

– Do you not feel animosity towards this sinful person while Allah is threatening to punish him with the Hellfire?

The distinguished companion, who was raised under the eyebrow of the Prophet ﷺ answered this question as follows:

– Yes, I feel animosity for the awful acts he has committed, but I do not feel animosity towards him.

Rumi expressed his love and mercy for all creatures for the sake of their Creator in the following lines:

*"My Lord! If the pious alone can hope for your mercy, who else can the sinful turn to for refuge?*

*O my Glorious Allah! If you accept only the prayers of your special servants, to whom can the criminal turn to in prayer? ... (Verily, You are the most Merciful of the merciful!)"*

❁

The sleeping man in the story by Rumi symbolizes the heedless person. The black snake that entered his mouth is his ego or *nafs*. The *amir* is the Perfect Guide. What woke him up with blows from the mace are seclusion and the battle against the *nafs*. Finally, the departure of the snake symbolizes liberation from the dominion of the *nafs*.

When Allah spoke to Musa عليه السلام in the sacred valley of Tuwa, He asked him about the staff he was holding. Musa answered:

He said, **"It is my rod: on it I lean; with it I beat down fodder for my flocks; and in it I find other uses."** (Taha, 18)

Allah ordered him: **"Throw it, O Musa!"** (Taha, 19)

Some scholars who have written commentaries on the Qur'an have interpreted these passages symbolically. They have explained that this guidance applied to the inner world of Musa ﷺ. When Musa ﷺ referred to temporal attachments in relation to his rod, Allah ordered him to abandon them. The ego and all the attachments associated with it, appeared in the form of a snake. In this way, the Creator revealed to Musa ﷺ the truth of the *nafs*. He was frightened. He trembled and he ran away. He was then ordered:

– O Musa! This snake represents attachment to things other than Allah. If the true nature of this condition was revealed to whomever suffers from it, all would flee.

Another symbolic meaning extrapolated from this story is related to the Lord's command, "Throw away your staff!" "You have now been blessed with the attributes of Tawhid, faith in the unity of Allah. How can it remain appropriate for you to rely on a staff and hope to benefit from it? How can you claim that you perform actions with this staff and claim that you continue to derive benefit from it? The first genuine step in the path of Tawhid is to leave all agents behind. So abandon all wishes and claims…"

The following is said in the *Tawilat-i Najmiyya:*

*He who hears the divine voice and sees the divine light detaches himself from everything else and never relies on anything other than the generosity and blessing of Allah. He completely cleanses his heart of all base desires.*

When Yusuf ﷺ was confronted with the tricks of Zulayha, an involuntary inclination rose up in him. At that moment, Allah revealed to him His indisputable proof. The roof of the room opened up and he saw his father Yaqub biting his finger. Another person appeared next to him who said:

– Yusuf, look to your right!

When Yusuf ﷺ looked to his right he saw a huge snake.

This is how the true nature of things was revealed to Yusuf ﷺ. The deeds of the ego appeared to him in both a concrete and ugly form. The transient appearances melted away and the deeper reality behind them emerged unveiled. At that moment, the divine manifestations and the secrets of things became clearly visible to him.

When the help of Allah arrived with a clear proof, Yusuf ﷺ was saved from the forthcoming harm of both his *nafs* and the woman.

The Prophet ﷺ said: "Paradise is surrounded by what the ego despises while the Hellfire is surrounded by what the *nafs* enjoys."

Overcoming the obstacle of the ego is made possible by making *bay'ah* (a special compact between a spiritual teacher and a disciple) with a friend of Allah who is an heir of the Prophet ﷺ and is linked to him through an unbroken chain of transmission. One must then submit himself to the training of his teacher. The Qur'an states: **"His (Allah's) hand is above their hands"** (Fath, 10), during the *bay'ah*. What is referred to by "their hands", are the hands of the companions of the Prophet ﷺ who made *bay'ah* or gave allegiance to him. In the same way, every man of Allah

(*ahlullah*), even a poor dervish, carries a *bay'ah* that reaches to the Prophet ﷺ. This is made possible through the chain of transmission that extends back in time though the hand of his teacher, his teacher's teacher, and the hands of all previous masters reaching back to the hand of the Prophet ﷺ. The power of Allah remains above all these hands through the course of time. The presence of the power of Allah with the hand of the Prophet ﷺ is what distinguishes the hands of the perfect servants of Allah and it is through this presence that they are able to function in extraordinary spiritual capacities. The Absolute Actor (*al-fa'il al-mutlaq*) is Allah and He grants His friends permission for the performance of acts spiritually engendered solely by Him.

There are two forms of love: real and metaphorical. Real love exists solely in the love of Allah while all metaphorical love is in fact an attachment to a created, transitory condition. The true lover is freed from all attachments because he is exclusively and completely attached to Allah alone. He neither recognizes nor considers the love of anything other than Him. For instance, Majnun finally attained to a spiritual state in which he could not even recognize Layla.

Rumi points to this issue in the following passage: "Due to a love for body, Allah made Majnun unable to distinguish between friend and foe."

The poet Fuzuli, who was a lover of the Prophet ﷺ in his famous Ode for Water (*Su Kasidesi*), compared the Prophet ﷺ with a rose:

*Let the garden keeper give up the rose garden to the flood of water,*

*For, a single rose (like him) would not blossom even if he would water a thousand rose gardens.*

Rumi articulated this love as follows: "The Almighty Allah gave such a special power to divine love that even if one is blessed with but a single drop of it, he will be emancipated from the concerns of both worlds."

❁

That means that the one who is lost in divine love no longer cares about the deficiencies, the jealousy, and the mistakes of others. In this way his perfection grows and he eventually attains to the destination he has sought. This is pure love. This is the love of Allah.

A guide attracts his disciples to himself through a spiritually sanctified act and reconfigures their bondage to the mundane by slowly transforming it into a genuine love of the divine. The real connections that gradually emerge between disciple and master slowly replace the false attachments and in fact become the first steps on the path to being extinguished in divine love.

Sheikh Sadi illustrates the divine acts of guides in the following story:

One day, one of my friends in the public spa gave me a soap that was made out of a special soil. I asked the soap:

– Are you musk or amber? I am genuinely impressed by your wondrous fragrance.

The soap answered:

– I was the soil of a rose. The rose's petals used to be burdened with drops of water in the morning. These rose petal drops used to fall on me as tears. With them, I was

molded like dough. In truth, I am an ordinary soil whose exquisite fragrance comes from the rose.

Allah has created the universe for human beings. He has put everything in the sea, in the sky and on the land under the command of man. However, in exchange He has burdened man with a weight of responsibility beyond that which mountains can bear.

If a human being looks at this world through materialistic, acquisitive eyes, he will inevitably be drawn to think about living in it in a fashion devoid of eternal insight. One event in life functions to restore balance to our vision. This is the event of "death". It is a deep spiritual concern of any person who takes life seriously for this transition draws into full relief the meaning of life and is thus filled with many important lessons. It is the extraction of these lessons and their integration that become the measure of one's ultimate success in life. Having acknowledged this truth, in a complementary sense we also need to remember that death is a sorrowful end for those who have cared only for their bodies and have abandoned their souls.

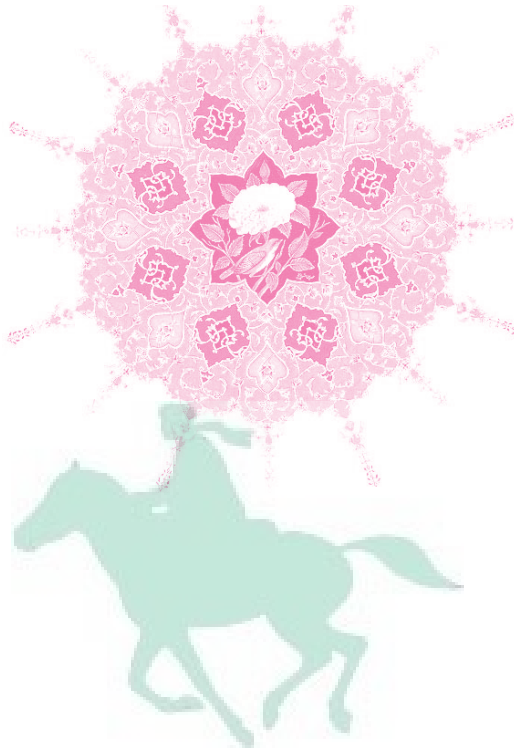
The Prophet ﷺ defined mundane life as follows:

*Why should I be concerned with this world? My condition is similar to a traveler who shortly stops over under a tree to get some rest in its shadow and then continues his journey.*

O Lord! May You bestow upon us the endless joy of your love and blessing.

Amen!

# The Wall of Existence



*Without emancipation from the passions of this earthly body,*
*It is impossible to prostrate before the One who offers us the elixir of immortality,*
*and to drink from that spiritual ocean till one's thirst has been quenched.*

Rumi

There was a wall at the shore of an ocean. Because the wall was too high, it was impossible for people to reach the water. There was a man standing on the wall, who was suffering from thirst. Ironically, he was unable to reach the water by the very wall on which he was standing. In fact, in his misery he resembled a fish out of water struggling to return home.

He suddenly threw a brick from the wall into the ocean. When the brick struck the surface, the ensuing sound soothed him like the elixir itself. His enthusiasm grew with the harmonious sound of the water. Ultimately, impassioned by its sound in his state of thirst, he began to throw bricks one by one into the water because of the delight the sound brought him.

The water asked:

– O dervish! Why are you in such a hurry to throw bricks into me?

The dervish, suffering from thirst, replied:

– O water! I succeed in extracting two forms of benefit from throwing the bricks and this is why I persist in it.

The first benefit: Hearing the voice of the water is music to the ear of the thirsty.

It is as the sound of Israfil's ﷺ trumpet to the dead calling all beings back to life.

The sound of the water is as the fertile spring rains in April when the gardens and the pastures burst forth into renewed life in all of its beauty through the tears of the sky.

Again, this sound is an invitation to give charity to the needy and the strangers who suffer from poverty.

Likewise, this sound is as the breath of Allah, the most Compassionate (*nafas al-Rahmani*), that reached the Prophet ﷺ from Yemen.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said about Uways al-Qarani: "I hear the breath of Allah, the most Compassionate (*nafas ar-Rahmani*) from Yemen. "

Again, this sound is as the smell of the Prophet's intercession in the divine presence on behalf of the sinful ones.

This sound is like the beautiful and kind fragrance of Yusuf (i. e.Joseph) ﷺ reaching out to the soul of the weakened Ya'qub (i. e.Jacob) ﷺ.

This sound is like the morning breeze of divine help that resonates from the minarets of the Green Dome in Medina the enlightened city (i. e.*Kubba-i Hadra* which houses the grave of the Prophet ﷺ) that reflects on the true lovers.

Again, it is like the gentle, refreshing wind of tranquility from Layla, which reached the miserable, exhausted, and abandoned Majnun.

Once more, this sound is like a warm lap open to the orphan and the destitute.

Finally, the second benefit I draw from throwing the bricks into you is that with each brick I remove from the wall the height of it falls and as a result I am proportionately that much closer to you.

**THE MATHNAWI:**

*O sane one! Surely, removing bricks from a tall wall reduces its height.*

*The decrease in the height of the wall brings it closer to the level of the water. Thus, separation of the bricks from the wall brings about union.*

*Prostration before Allah is through taking apart those bricks that are cemented to each other and this necessitates closeness to Him. It is said in the Qur'an:* ***"Prostrate and draw near!"***[9]

*The wall of existence defeats our prostration so long as it remains high.*

*Without emancipation from the passions of this earthly body, it is impossible to prostrate before the One who offers us the elixir of immortality, and to drink from that spiritual ocean till one's thirst has been quenched.*

*The more thirsty one feels, the more quickly will one tear the bricks from the wall.*

9. The Qur'an, Alaq 19.

*Whoever loves the sound of water more will take down bigger pieces from the wall of existence that is preventing us from reaching the water.*

*The lover of the sound of the water will become more and more enthused by it until he will hear no other voice.*

*He is to be saluted, who sees each day as a treasure, makes the best use of his time and tries to fulfill his duties and to quickly pay back his debt.*

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Sheikh Sadi Shirazi defined a human being as "a few drops of water with thousands of anxieties…"

The wall that blocks our way to the ocean symbolizes in the story the egoistic desires and the endless worldly passions, particularly selfishness.

The ocean symbolizes divine knowledge and divine love. Those whose hearts are familiar with divine love are in a state of constant longing for the ocean. Each and every sound and breath that come from the ocean of knowledge shower them with endless bliss and prepare them for the journey to Allah.

For those who taste divine love, this world is a mirror of wisdom before the spiritual intellect. Since human beings are honored by virtue of the rank of their soul rather than by virtue of the condition of their body, perfection in worship can only be attained through a deep understanding of the soul. The human quality that is most praised in the Qur'an is this one.

It may easily be predicted that a day away from divine love and spiritual pleasures, spent solely for entertainment and for the craziness of a beastly life, will not bring about a

blissful night. It is also only to be expected that such a day will not bring about a delightful morning. Insanity and futility before the world's rich scenes and events, which are full of divine lessons, and the consequences of this state eventually being borne out in the unknown pains of death, is a pity for human honor and sanctity! The rosy colors of this world fade in the Hereafter when worldly laughter becomes cries in the Hellfire.

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

– Never sit with the dead people!

The companions of the Prophet ﷺ asked:

– O Messenger of Allah! Who are the dead people?

The Prophet ﷺ replied:

– The dead are those who are lost in this world.

If one mingles with the heedless people who are the dead of this world, one drinks a deadly poison without being aware of it. The spiritual consequence of this influence is to deaden the heart.

The only solution is to remain in the company of those who are alive with spirituality. If one is forced to be separate from them for a reason, the remedy is to read the Qur'an with heart by contemplating on it with increasing depth.

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said: "Those who want to converse with the Almighty Allah should read the Qur'an!"

Those who follow the straight path, described in the Qur'an, should adopt the moral teachings of the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. They should also increase their familiarity with the stories of those previous prophets

mentioned in the Qur'an. From this form of spirituality, will rains of blessing and wisdom nourish their hearts.

❁

Narrative has it that Jabir, may Allah be pleased with him, said:

"I went to the door of the Prophet and knocked on it. He responded:

– Who is he? I answered:

– I am.

The Prophet did not sound too happy with my usage of "I. "The word "I" usually connotes pride and arrogance. "

The great master Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* tells this story as follows:

*"The lover, with a heart in flames, knocked on the door of the beloved. Yet, when he said "I" in response to the question "Who are you?" the beloved said:*

*– Turn back! The time for you to enter inside has not yet come! At this table of spiritual blessings there is no room for those with immature souls!*

*The miserable lover turned back from the door. He spent a year wandering in torment, during which time he burned with flames of separation and with longing for the beloved.*

*Eventually, the fires of love ripened the lover. He returned to the house of the beloved.*

*He knocked on the door with great care and with precise etiquette because he was extremely worried that unkind words might flow from his mouth.*

*The beloved asked:*

*– Who is at the door?*

*He replied:*

*– O the one who appropriated my heart! It is you at your door!*

*The beloved answered:*

*– Since you are like me, now you may enter inside. O the one whose existence consists of me!Enter inside! Two "I"s would not have fit in one house.*

*He added:*

*– O the one who overcame his ego in a year! Enter inside! You are no longer like the crude bush that is the opposite of the roses in the garden! You are now the king of the roses! You are the one who has abandoned apparent dualism and has become me."*

Similarly, Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* said:

Whoever says "I" or "We" at the door of the beloved remains in the valley of "no" (that is refusal by the beloved). They will never be accepted at the door of the friend.

Imagine that even a thread with split fibers cannot enter a needle's eye. All the fibers must be united and must become one for the thread to enter the needle's eye and fulfill its function. It is possible for a lover to succeed in passing through the eye of the needle of unity only through becoming like a unified thread, only after being burned in the fire of separation.

It is indeed difficult for one to become crystal clear and transparent by spiritual refinement and self-cleansing from egoism to the extent that one becomes like a unified, thin thread that can pass through the eye of the needle of unity.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to attain to this spiritual station in order to be showered with divine blessings.

**"Lo! they who deny Our revelations and scorn them, for them the gates of heaven will not be opened, nor will they enter the Garden until the camel goeth through the needle's eye.Thus do We requite the guilty"** ('Araf, 40)**.**

This means that those who run after false pride, arrogance, and egoism will not deserve to realize paradisiacal unity with Allah unless they abandon their transient false selves, associated selfishness, and become pure souls in the path of Allah. The gates of heaven will remain closed for them until they learn the rules of Islamic law and the Sufi path under the guidance of a truly qualified master and thus cleanse their hearts of egoism, which is a quality under the influence of Satan.

The beastly side of a human being can only be reformed through love, humility and negation of self, that is by reaching to a state of nothingness. Only then can one successfully pass through the eye of the needle of trial through endurance.

Yunus Emre, the great Sufi master and poet, explains that egoism is not allowed in the path to Allah.

*For, to say "I"*

*Is not a correct custom for overcoming the barrier.*

*Looking down at us, the servants of the dervish lodge,*

*Is not the path to Allah.*

On the other hand, the servant should not be deceived by thinking that he spiritually arrived at the radiating light in his heart through his own efforts; instead, he should

remain vigilantly aware of the reality that this was a divine gift for which he should be grateful. Otherwise, it would be profoundly destructive for him to become proud of such a divine blessing and be deceived by his ego into believing that such an achievement was through his own efforts. The destiny of those who act proudly and egoistically after receiving benefit from the light of a saint or a prophet is to regress back into darkness. Such an outcome prevents a person from becoming a true servant of Allah and follower of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Islamic history offers abundant examples of people who have fallen into this trap, such as the story of Qarun.[10]

Consequently, in order to be protected from falling into this spiritual pitfall, the focus should be on the One who provides the spiritual bounties rather than on the bounties themselves. Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* draws attention to this issue in the following verses:

*"One has to leave behind many resorts and caravanserais (i.e. spiritual stations) in order to be able to reach his true home."*

*Do not attribute the radiance to the iron when it is heated in the fire, because it is the fire that gives it a temporary light and heat.*

*If through a window you see a home full of light, do not attribute the light to either the window or the home but rather to the sun that is the source of illumination.*

*The sun tells those who are proud of their brightness: "O senseless, arrogant ones! Wait, you will see the truth*

10. For the story of Qarun, see the Qur'an, Qasas 76-83.

*when I disappear from the horizon behind this mountain or sea. "*

In the same way, when a body appears beautiful and tender you should know that the real power belongs to the soul that is hidden within it.

Those who understand this truth and abandon their egoism, in other words those who gain freedom from the claws of the ego and die before physical death, find as a reward a new life in their Beloved. In this new life, Allah becomes the eye with which they see, the ear with which they hear, the foot with which they walk, and the hand with which they hold. At this station the servant lives in a great state of union and he sees nothing other than Allah. Yunus Emre has beautifully recorded his experience after union with Allah in the following:

*I have found the life of life,*
*Let my life be plundered!*
*I no longer care about bankruptcy,*
*Let my store be plundered!*

*I have abandoned my ego,*
*Unveiled my eye,*
*Reached my Beloved,*
*Let my fears be plundered!*

*Yunus, your words are sweet,*
*You have eaten honey and sugar,*
*I have found the honey of honey,*
*Let my beehive be plundered!*

❁

One of the highest spiritual stations one can attain to is the station of witnessing the manifestations of Allah alone

and ignoring all other things. The servant who is at this level is completely absolved in Allah. At this level, one deeply experiences the following truth as expressed by a great Sufi master:

*Allah is so manifest that He becomes invisible due to His excessive manifestation. This is similar to the sun that becomes invisible to normal eyes when its beams are too strong for them to see.*

This is the final stage of the state of witnessing Allah (*mushahada*). It is the state of being a loving witness. In other words, it is a state in which the heart is cleansed of animal qualities and of being enslaved by them. One arrives at a point where he is with his Lord even when he is socially with others in a group; he is also with everyone even when he is alone with his Lord.

The following event illustrates how it is to be with Allah while one is outwardly within society.

The great master Muhammad Parisa passes through Baghdad on his way to pilgrimage in Mecca. In the market, he sees a young man with an illuminated face who deals with gold. Since his store is crowded, the young man appears always busy. The great Sufi master feels sorry that he is so lost in mundane affairs and thinks that the young man has been captured by the world at an age that for the duration of one's life is ideal period for devout worship. He then looks with the eye of his heart and amazingly witnesses that the heart of this young man is always with Allah. This state is called "unity within diversity." It is when one feels Allah's presence and one remains alone with Him even when one is outwardly in a crowd.

As to being with everyone while one is with his Lord, this is the state of the prophets and the close friends of Allah. This is an attribute of living hearts; it is a sign of sharing the distress of one's community.

A concrete example of this state is provided during the ascension of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ into the Heavens (*miraj*). He drew near to his Lord ***"at a distance of two bows' length or (even) nearer,"*** (Najm, 53) which is beyond our comprehension. The Prophet ﷺ thought about his community (*ummah*) even at that time and prayed as follows: "O my Lord! I have come to your presence with the shortcomings of my community and their sins. O my Lord! I ask you to forgive my parents and to forgive my community!"

Those who perceive a lesson in these incidents strive to be with Allah in all circumstances. In this state, the meaning of the divine hadith (i.e. *hadith qudsi*) which states that "I become his sight with which he sees and his hearing with which he hears" becomes manifest. This is the state, which is mentioned, in the following verse: **"And thou (Muhammad) threwest not when thou didst throw, but Allah threw"** (Anfal, 17)**.** The most important attribute of this state is that it is the state of Muhammad ﷺ. The great saints of this community (*ummah*) are granted a portion of this state to the degree of their love for the Prophet ﷺ. Even if they cannot fully attain to this station, their consciousness grows ultimately to the degree of their sincerity.

However, those who fully attain this level say, "I am not myself. This breath is from him."

For this reason, when they say "I," its usage is metaphorical for them because they have been dispossessed of their selves. Esrar Dede put it very well:

*What I call I, I; what I name I is all You.*

*What I call my soul and my body are all You.*

Another poet has explained in the following poem how the ego functions as but a veil for a person and how one must save oneself from it:

*This is how I have found on this path*
*That my self is a veil to me.*
*I have studied, understood and realized*
*That my self is a veil to me.*

❁

The way a seed of wheat eventually enters the body of a living being and becomes a part of that living being;

The way kohl (antimony), which after being smashed and turned into powder is put on the eye; it ceases to be a stone; instead, it increases the eyesight;

The way a river reaches the ocean and ceases to be a river and becomes part of the sea;

In the same way, perfection and spiritual knowledge emerge in one's soul as one receives the teaching, care and blessing of a friend of Allah. Such an individual's heart, which used to be dead in its approach to the rest of creation and life's events, is enlivened.

One day, the king of Telemsan, Sultan Yahya, went out with his entourage to have a walk in the city. The people, who were fascinated by his glory, stood up with respect, applauded and shouted: "Long live our Sultan!" Yet, the

Sultan saw someone with an illuminated face who stood outside the crowd. He asked the people around him out of curiosity about this enlightened stranger. They said:

– Our Sultan! He is the famous sheikh from Tunis. He lives in a cave as an ascetic.

The Sultan became extremely curious about the sheikh and rode his horse toward him. When he arrived before the sheikh, he asked him a question that had preoccupied his mind for a long time:

– Is it permissible for me to offer my prayers while dressed in this silk?

The sheikh from Tunis did not want to answer this question and recommended that he ask the scholars in his palace. Nevertheless, the Sultan insisted with such persistence that he had to give his opinion:

– Imagine a dog. It finds a dead animal and fills its stomach with its meat. Its inside and its outside become so filthy. Nonetheless, it tries to lift one leg up while urinating for the purpose of keeping itself clean!

The Sultan screamed:

– What do you mean?

The sheikh replied:

– I want to say that your stomach and body are loaded with heavy unlawful weight and the violation of others' rights. In spite of this, you are querying me about the permissibility of prayer when dressed in silk!

These deep words touched the heart of the Sultan. Consequently, he immediately took off his silk clothes and

threw them away. Then he threw away his sword and loudly proclaimed to the people around him:

– O Muslims! Forgive me and find another sultan for yourselves!

He became a loyal disciple and follower of the Tunisian sheikh.

Sultan Yahya reached to such a high spiritual station that when people would request prayer from the Tunisian sheikh, he would tell them:

– Request Sultan Yahya to pray for you because even I may not have done what he did if I had been in his position…If the other sultans in this world knew the treasure of happiness he has attained, they would also sacrifice all that they have to receive it.

❁

The friends of Allah educate their students by taking into consideration their weaknesses, inclinations and worldly circumstances. Therefore, one should not conclude from the above story that 'in Islam, it is not good to occupy administrative office.' The point made in the above story relates solely to the state of Sultan Yahya. Since Sultan Yahya had violated the rights of other people and had nurtured his body with unlawful food, his spiritual training and the cleansing of his heart took a different course. Otherwise, a very wide range of examples may be found in the life styles of the friends of Allah. For instance, we can see an opposite example in the relationship Fatih Sultan Mahmad Han, the conqueror of Istanbul, had with both Akshemseddin and Abu'l-Vefa. The great master Akshemseddin moved to Goynuk, a town in Central Anatolia, before Istanbul was conquered. He was concerned

that Fatih Sultan Mahmad would neglect the work he needed to do as a sultan because of the spiritual pleasure he was experiencing in attending the sheikh's lessons. Another great master, Abu'l-Vefa, who independently acted according to the same inspiration, sent the following message to Fatih Sultan Mahmad who had insisted on taking an appointment from him:

*"Our Sultan Fatih has a sensitive and ecstatic heart. If he enters into our world and shares deeply in the spiritual pleasures we have, he will never want to return to his duties as a statesman! Nevertheless, the state and the Islamic community as a whole are entrusted to him. If he surrenders his duties and someone else with comparable qualifications does not replace him, then the state and the community will suffer. In such a circumstance, Allah would hold both of us accountable!*

*The spiritual atmosphere here would take over his soul; consequently, his material wealth would flow here... The money that would better be spent on the widows, orphans, strangers and the needy would end up in our hands. Love of this world would penetrate into the hearts of our disciples and bring about disorder in our ranks.*

*We offer our prayers and our love for our Sultan from here. His heart is within our heart. The mode of our relationship with him will be this way since the benefit of the community requires it so!"*

The spiritual education of Aziz Mahmdu Hudayi was also striking.

Aziz Mahmud Hudayi used to serve as a judge. Under instructions from his master, Muhammad Uftade, he

abandoned all of his worldly ties and positions. This was necessary because the method of education that his master was going to implement required it so. In the end, his consciousness would grow to a level that would allow him to educate the sultans of the world. Yet, the great master Hudayi who had been trained using methods of abstention trained the sultans according to the alternative method, while they were sitting on their thrones immersed in worldly glory. He taught them to eliminate all mundane attractions from their hearts. Because of this education, Sultan Ahmed I entered such a deep state of identification with him that even their poetry would have been impossible to distinguish if they had not included their pen names on it.

In short, the methods of spiritual training employed by the special servants of Allah, whether it is through abundance and wealth or abstention and poverty, should be closely examined and understood. The methods always vary according to the spiritual qualities of the student. For instance, Qarun did not understand this point and followed his ego in spite of the repeated warnings Prophet Musa ﷺ made and the end of his life was filled with remorse. His end is a warning full of lessons for all sane and intelligent people. Therefore, during spiritual training the best course of action to follow in the multitude of trials experienced is, to the depth of one's ability, unquestioning submission to Allah. This is only possible through a sincere love for the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and wholeheartedly following a perfect guide.

In this regard, the great master Rumi has said: "How happy are those individuals who are purified of their base desires through finding a friendship in the heart of a perfect guide." In our conscience, this is the warning that we must

cultivate forms of love and affection that will find their place rightfully in eternity rather than in the material world alone. Unless the love of the holy Qur'an nourishes our dry hearts as the April rains nourish the soil, we will never attain to the emerald green of a Muhammad type of season. The gardens of the heart await the rains of righteous deeds as the soil in love awaits the spring rains. Out of these rains, with the blessing of Allah, grow buds of love and compassion and merciful service to His creation. The human being thus becomes a condensed summary of the entirety of the universe and realizes his function as the greatest form of creation. He becomes the eye which sees and the ear which hears of the Lord. From his hand, his tongue and his heart all of humanity benefits.

The following story from the *Mathnawi* about the Caliph Umar illustrates this truth very well:

*"A Byzantine ambassador comes to Medina the Radiant (Medine-i Munawwara) for a political meeting. He asks about the palace of Caliph Umar. The people with whom he speaks tell him:*

*– Even though the name of the Caliph is known to the entirety of the world, he does not have a palace that belongs to this world. His heart is a shining palace. The only worldly property he has is a small hut that resembles the houses of the poor, destitute ones. Yet, because of the illness in your eye, you will not be able to see his spiritual palace.*

*The curiosity and shock of the Byzantine ambassador increases after hearing these words. He leaves his horse and the gifts he has been carrying and begins searching for the Great Umar al-Faruq. He asks everyone about*

*the whereabouts of the Caliph. Because of his astonishment, he says to himself:*

*– This means that there is such a king like this in the world. He is hidden from everyone's sight like the soul.*

*Continuing his search to find him, a bedouin woman tells him:*

*– This is the Caliph you are looking for, sleeping under the date tree! While everyone else sleeps on a bed, he does the opposite and sleeps on the sand! Go there and see the divine shadow (zil al-ilahi) under the date tree!*

*When the ambassador sees Umar in sleep, awe and admiration prevail over his soul. Awe and love are opposite feelings, yet, the ambassador witnesses with amazement how these two feelings were united in his soul. He says to himself:*

*– I am someone who has seen emperors and who has gained their appreciation! Although awe never took over me while I was in their presence, the glory and love I feel for this man have taken over my mind.*

*This Caliph sleeps on the ground without guards protecting him. And I thrill before him with my entire body! What is this? How can I make sense of this? Perhaps, this awe is from Allah. Perhaps, it is not from this man clothed in a coarse wool cloth.*

*While the Byzantine ambassador is experiencing this spiritual turmoil, Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, wakes up from his sleep. The ambassador greets him with great respect. The Caliph returns his greeting. Then*

*he accepts the ambassador into his internal palace and gives him tranquility. The shattered heart of the ambassador is regenerated. He talks to him with refined, deep and enlightening words. The ambassador observes his spiritual state.*

*The ambassador who came to the Great Caliph Umar as a foreigner becomes his lover. He looses himself because of the overwhelming pleasure he takes from this conversation. He forgets that he is an ambassador; he also forgets the message he had to relay to him.*

*Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, continues his conversation with great enthusiasm after seeing the ambassador's positive response. He explains to him the states of the soul and the stations on the spiritual path. He discusses time beyond time, the levels of the great friends of Allah, and the unlimited flights of the bird of the soul (i. e.Zumrud u Anka) coming to this world.*

*Eventually the sun of true faith radiates in the heart of the ambassador and he joins the caravan of happiness by embracing Islam after bearing witness that there is no allah but Allah and Muhammad is his Messenger."*

❁

The great master Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* said: "The teacher was qualified and the student was open and willing to learn the truth.

To be sure, when a guide perceives a talented student, he readily sows the seed of faith in the unity of Allah in the pure land of his heart."

A pious person can be identified from the light in his face. From his face radiates a light of peace and tranquility.

A corrupt person can also be identified from the signs in his face. What emanates from his face spreads darkness and despair.

The glance of a spiritual master attracts hearts like a magnet if they have the ability to grow toward divine truth and wisdom. The power of their glance derives from the spiritual chain to which they are attached that extends back to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ was so pure and refined that his entire body consisted of divine light. As a result, his shadow never fell on the ground.

Suleyman Celebi has expressed this truth in a couplet in a beautiful manner:

*His body was light from top to bottom*

*Light is manifest; light has no shadow.*

The spiritual architect of Pakistan, Muhammad Iqbal, on one occasion visited some pilgrims who had just returned from Medina. During the course of conversation, he expressed the following:

*"You have visited Medina! What kind of gifts have you purchased from the otherworldly market of Medina for your souls? The material gifts you brought back such as prayer beads, hats and rugs will all fade and will wear out. What did you bring back of the other gifts of Medina that never fade and that will forever give life to the hearts?*

*Are there among your gifts the loyalty and submission of Abu Bakr, the justice of Umar, the faith, shyness and generosity of Osman, and the dynamism and struggle of Ali? Can we give vibrancy from the happy*

*times of the Prophet ﷺ to the present Muslim world that is suffering from so many pains?*

Iqbal was a great Islamic poet and thinker, who felt pity for the misery of the Muslim world, and lived with the pain and sorrow of not being able to revive the spirit of Islam.

In a hadith, the Prophet ﷺ says: "This world and the Hereafter are like the two wives of a person. The more you make one happy, the more you make the other angry…"

The more the call to the worldly attractions is rooted in one's heart, the more alien he becomes to the voice of the Hereafter. Conversely, if the call to the attractions of the Hereafter is rooted in the heart, the voice of worldly pleasures becomes alien to him.

The great master Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* has said:

*If you accept one of these voices, you will not even hear the other! The lover becomes deaf and blind to the things that fall in opposition to his love.*

*Yet, hesitation is a prison for the soul for it prevents you from ever taking a firm direction.*

*Worldly love draws one to one direction while love for the otherworldly draws one to another. Each one says, "My path is the true path."*

*Such hesitation is a trap in the path to Allah. Salute the one whose foot never slips and he who protects himself from this kind of swinging.*

*O the one who is unaware of manners and etiquette! If you want to save yourself from hesitation, look for a virtuous guide for yourself! If you do not want to wander around with a perplexed mind, take the path of a friend*

*of Allah, like the path of a gazelle in a forest, which will take you to indescribable beauties! Otherwise, you might run away from a rose garden, thinking at a distance that it is fire and therefore be deprived of its beauty; you might run after the mirages you see in the desert of this world, yet the mirages that you think are the elixir are rather nothing but the hot sand which will never pass through your throat.*

*If you do not want to fall into this predicament, do not block the ear of the heart with the cotton of heedlessness! Listen to the words of the friends of Allah and become a Kitmir[11] in the path of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.*

The caravan of love, which will continue until the Last Day, will be nourished and sustained by those tears of the heart arising out of love for the Prophet ﷺ. Yunus Emre, who had a tender heart, expressed this in an excellent manner:

*Let the lovers be burned*
*With your love, O Messenger of Allah!*
*Let those who drink the wine of love*
*Be quenched, O Messenger of Allah!*

*To those who love you,*
*Give your intercession.*
*To the bodies of the believers,*
*You are life, O Messenger of Allah!*

*I am in love with this beautiful face,*
*I am the nightingale in that rose garden,*

11. The name of the dog of the Companions of the Cave.

*Let the ones who have yet to love you, be burned*
*In the fire, O Messenger of Allah!*

A great blessing awaits those who grow closer to the level of 'perfection in religion' (i. e.*ihsan*) by taking a share from the exemplary personality and spiritual world of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ!

# Affinity

*If you are rosewater, your place is among bright faces.*
*If you are filth, everywhere you are a source of anguish.*
*Look at the windows of the perfume shops!*
*They increase the elegance of one variety by blending it with a similar variety.*
*When likes meet, the beauty of this union is expressed in a distinct smile.*
*In order to separate the honest and the pure from the filthy,*
*Allah sent prophets and books.*
*If your thoughts are as a rose, then you are in a rose garden.*

Rumi

Among the most dominant attributes of the created world engendered by the cosmic play of complementary opposites are affinity and balance. If this harmony is disrupted on a small scale, it leads to anarchy. If it is disrupted on the level of the created world, it is called the Day of Judgment or the Last Day.

The created world can be divided into animate and inanimate realms. All created entities have not only qualities in common with other forms, but in addition, there are differences between the forms. The ultimate reason for this is rooted in the will of Allah. In the case of inanimate forms, opposites attract each other. One example of this would be the positive and negative electrical poles. On the other hand, in the case of animate forms the opposite is the rule. The souls of living beings tend to be attracted to similar forms; they are not generally drawn to their opposites. Although there is a clear difference between the modes of attraction in the animate and inanimate realms, each illustrates a deep-rooted tendency towards unity. This inclination toward union stems from the unity that exists at

the source of existence itself and is a manifestation of the flow of divine power towards oneness, whereas the tendency we observe for the souls of living forms to be drawn to forms sharing common attributes is ultimately caused by the predisposition of the ego.

Indeed, one of the most powerful proclivities in all creatures with soul is egoism and this condition reaches its pinnacle in human beings. For this reason, the last base desire one cleanses from one's heart, after the purification of all other base desires, is the desire for leadership, control, or political power.

When egoism reaches its zenith in human beings and one examines in that state of consciousness the subsequent manifestations of love and hatred, it is observed that love grows to the degree of similarity and hatred rises to the degree of difference. This suffices to demonstrate that in truth one only loves oneself and this truth is then borne out in our deep tendency to be enchanted by people like us. For instance, Yaqub ﷺ witnessed in Yusuf ﷺ features of himself and as a consequence, his soul was naturally drawn towards him. Similarity is thus one of the most fundamental reasons for metaphorical as opposed to divine love.

This phenomenon is such an innate feature among beings with souls that it can even be observed in the animal world. A common story exemplifying this revolves around a dialogue between people and a nightingale. The people said to the nightingale:

– Chant!

But it did not chant. They repeated:

– Chant!

It did not chant.

Eventually, they threatened it:

– We will put you in a golden cage and we will put a crow in with you!!!

The nightingale then began to chant out of fear of being put in the same cage with a crow.

Common people witness in this story a comprehensive and systematic illustration of what we have explained before.

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* in the *Mathnawi* has provided us with an even better illustration. It follows:

*"A hunter put a gazelle he had captured in a barn with cows and donkeys. The gazelle was running around the barn in a state of fear and shock. That evening the hunter came to feed the animals with hay. The donkeys and the cows relished the hay and began devouring it, but the gazelle's circumstance was radically different. It was still in a fearful state, and was rubbing its eyes since they were being irritated by dust coming from the hay. This elegant creature, which carries perfume in its body, continued to suffer this way in the barn. On observing this, one of the donkeys said to the other donkeys for the purpose of mocking the gazelle:*

*– Keep quiet! This is an animal bearing the qualities of kings and nobles!*

*Another animal said:*

*– If so, then this animal should politely climb up to the throne of the king and sit there!*

*Another donkey, which had been closely following the situation, invited the gazelle to the hay once again. The gazelle refused:*

*– No, I have no appetite!*

*The donkey replied:*

*– I know that you are feigning reluctance.*

*The gazelle in response to these words, said:*

*– I used to wander in verdant pastures among limpid rivers in gardens of magnificent beauty and I used to feast my eyes on the way our Creator had ornamented the natural world. If it has been my destiny to fall into this painful circumstance, how can you expect my nature to change so quickly? I even used to eat catnip, tulip and basil with reluctance and only after carefully smelling them. I used to observe with great awe the harmony in the flow of divine power in nature and it was in this bedazzled state of awe when hunters were able to catch us with tears pouring forth from our eyes and broken hearts.*

*A donkey responded:*

*– You may speak as you wish… It is easy to lie when you are away from your home.*

*The gazelle answered:*

*– The smell of musk that exudes from my belly bears testimony to my words. As to your situation, it is transparent. These words would of course seem like a lie to you. I am really lonely and helpless among you…"*

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* illuminates abstract facts difficult for the human mind to grasp through simple and concrete stories. For instance, in this story, he has used the example

of animals with opposite attributes to illustrate the difficulty of harmonizing opposing natures.

The gazelle are among the world's most elegant animals in their habits of eating, drinking, breathing, sense of beauty and kindness. For instance, when hunters have a person play a flute in the lush greenery around a river, the gazelles will be drawn to the melodies of the moving music. When their eyes and hearts have been overtaken by the tenderness of the music, the merciless hunters catch them in traps and put them to death for their musk, their fine leather skin, and their tender, luscious meat.

In contrast, donkeys and cows may be noted for their ugliness in voice and disposition and correspondingly their lives are rooted in egoism.

Rumi, after exemplifying how painful it is to be in a shared environment with beings of opposite qualities, continues to illustrate this pain of contradistinction in the following poem:

*"If one is placed together with his opposite, this is a torture to death for him.*

*For this reason, the one who is close to Allah is in a state of suffering in his body. For, the bird of his soul is tied up with the ego that is not of its kind.*

*The soul resembles the nightingale among birds. The ego, which represents nature, is as the crow. The nightingale is wounded by closeness to crows and owls.*

*The nightingale of the soul moans bitterly among the selfish egos of crows and evil intentioned owls."*

The Qur'an states **"...when I have made him complete and breathed into him of My spirit..."** (Hijr, 29). The spirit entered this cage of the body by virtue of the Lord and the process through which this happens is beyond human comprehension. Deep in the consciousness of human beings, there is a yearning for the world from which they have come. In this world, the spirit is not free. It is imprisoned in the body. The process of maturation that the soul is passing through, for the duration of its life in this world, is empowered through its longing for its original home, the spiritual world. This inexplicable sense of separation and the suffering that ensues from it continue until the soul is reunified with Allah. For the duration of the soul's stay in this world, the ego always confronts it as an obstacle to spiritual reunification and the real growth that entails. Having children, property, status and position and having control over them according to the desires of the ego are the deceptive toys of this world that the ego uses at all times for the purpose of distraction. A human being ends up constructing a shadow like, imaginative world based on egotistical desires. This myriad of desires, of whims and of worries traceable to this false world consume the fullness of our time and energy leading us to waste our life running after transitory, empty ends.

The overall circumstance that the soul finds itself in when imprisoned in the body is much like that of the gazelle in the barn full of cows and donkeys. As a consequence, just as the gazelle is plagued by feeling like a stranger among aliens, so too is the soul afflicted by an all pervasive sense of strangeness for the duration of its stay in the body and the broader physical world.

Inwardly, the intrinsic altruism of the soul is annoyed by the selfishness of the ego and each human being's life

for its duration is punctuated by a perpetual struggle between these two opposing forces.

This same story is played out in a different way in the worldly life of spiritually highly refined individuals. When viewed through the window of the heart, their suffering, which is bitterer than death, originates in the trials and tribulations such sublime characters are tormented by while being trapped in a world filled with other people most notable for their ignorance and insolence. In the history of the world, such suffering has primarily been the purview of the prophets and those who have followed them. The lives of such individuals are frequently lonely and strange, passed among people without good manners. Ibrahim ﷺ was thrown into a huge fire because he raised the flag of faith in the one Allah. Yusuf ﷺ was expelled into a great loneliness even among his brothers. He was slandered when he was away from his homeland and had to spend time in prison as a total stranger. The Children of Israel left Musa ﷺ alone against a cruel and oppressive society saying to him: "O Musa! You and your Lord should go to war and gain victory! Subsequently, we will follow you!" Similarly, the rebellious Children of Israel cut Zakariya ﷺ into two pieces with a saw. His son, the Prophet Yahya ﷺ was also martyred without mercy. Isa ﷺ was tried together with thieves. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was stoned by the unfortunate people of Taif. Similar examples are abundant.

Without exception, these individuals have always endured their respective trials with an exalted degree of patience granted to them by their Creator and were thus continually raised to higher spiritual stations. Occasionally, Allah took the pure hearted ones under His own protection. The Seven Sleepers or the Companions of the Cave, who

lived in an evil society, were put into a deep state of sleep and were protected from any harm in a cave. For, it is better to be asleep rather than mingling with heedless people and it was for this reason that the Seven Sleepers were only reawakened when a righteous society had emerged.

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* compares the Gnostics with the nightingales and explains that it is impossible for them to find affinity with people whose souls are evil:

*"The home of the nightingales is in lush vegetation, in pastures and in rose gardens. The original home of the dung-beetles is, however, amidst rubbish and rotten garbage."*

There is an essential attraction between the forms of life in this world and the environments they are drawn to live in. The nightingale finds itself at home in beautiful vegetation, in pastures and by fountains which flow with music, while the dung-beetle, and those who resemble it enjoy dirt or immorality, corruption and hypocrisy. A rose explained this, in a spiritual tongue, to the beetle as follows:

*"O dung-beetle! You run away from the rose garden, but this hatred of yours only serves to point to the perfection of the rose garden!"*

These contradistinctions are a consequence of a divine balance established between good and evil. The friends of Allah attribute the balance of attraction we observe between the different forms to a reflection of the affinity rooted in eternal love that pervades all of creation. These superior individuals function to help people who have fallen to stations among the lowest ranks of creation after having been created at the highest rank to regain their original

form through the realignment that is catalyzed by the power of the divine love that flows through them.

In this world, which is full of trials, suffering, pain and sorrow, sharing company with good-hearted people blessed both with knowledge and with perfect characters is the only way to open the doors of spiritual success. The soul, which belongs to the eternal world, can in this manner alone realize its potential and thus be saved from the ongoing inflictions of the ego. For this reason, it is a must to protect the heart from the spiritually debilitating impress of congregations of heedless people.

Rumi, *quddisa sirruh,* explains this principle as follows:

*"Birds fly with their likes. Socialization with people who have different characters is like entering a grave.*

*Likes attract each other. Therefore, how can an elegant gazelle live with donkeys and cows?"*

All unions take place within the framework of the shared ideas and the shared understandings common to regularly shared spheres of life. Those who by choice live in worlds in opposition to one another would suffer more bitterly than through death if they had to routinely socialize with each other.

Similarly, it is stated in the Qur'an: **"Women impure are for men impure, and men impure for women impure and women of purity are for men of purity, and men of purity are for women of purity..."** (Nur, 26)**.**

The great scholar, Imam Ghazali, while explaining this principle, pointed out that not just diseases and their associated microbes but also spiritual states, morality and character traits are contagious. Therefore, good character

is seen in those who associate with good individuals, while evil character is found in those who associate with evil people.

The following hadith also supports this teaching: "The difference between a good and a bad friend is similar to the difference between a musk seller and a blacksmith who operates the bellows of a furnace. From the first you would either buy musk or he would freely offer it to you, while the blacksmith would either burn your clothes or home or you would acquire an offensive fragrance from him"

In addition, people commonly employ the following proverb to attest to the same truth: "The one who sleeps with the blind wakes up cross-eyed." For, in principle whatever the energy of a character may be, it is contagious.

O Lord! Permit us to be together in this world with those of your servants who are treasures of wisdom and divine secrets. Resurrect us, your weak servants, with them.

Amen!